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Allegiances

SUNCLAN

LEADER Dawnstar- Golden brown she-cat with green eyes

DEPUTY Cinderflame- Dark gray she-cat with amber eyes

MEDICINE CATS Pebblestep- Gray and white she-cat with blue eyes

Honeyfrost- Golden and white she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Owlpaw

WARRIORS *(toms and she-cats without kits)*

Adderstrike- Silver tom with lighter tabby markings and dark blue eyes

Fawnheart- Light brown she-cat with lighter spots on her flank and pale green eyes

Lionclaw- Golden tom with amber eyes and abnormally large claws

Goldenleaf- Golden she-cat with green eyes

Turtleblaze- Mottled brown tom with green eyes

Yarrowtail- Fluffy, pale gray tom with pale green eyes

Flamepetal- Ginger she-cat with green eyes

Brackenpelt- Dark ginger tom with amber eyes

Cloudspots- Fluffy gray and white tom with blue eyes

Rosewind - Ginger she-cat with a white tipped tail and green eyes

Cherryleaf- Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes

Briarrose - Pale brown she-cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Maplepaw

Earthpelt- Brown she-cat with white chest and paws with green eyes

Mudfall- Dark gray tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Blossompaw

Flashtail- White tom with green eyes

Falconheart- Golden Brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Larkthorn- Dark brown she-cat with green eyes

Hollystorm- Ginger she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Rushpaw

Burnclaw- Ginger tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Oakpaw

Snowfeather- White she-cat with blue eyes

Windsong- Gray she-cat with green eyes

Bluestream- Blue-gray she-cat with blue eyes

APPRENTICES *(more than six moons old, in training to become warriors)*

Maplepaw - Golden-brown she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Fawnheart and Turtleblaze)

Bramblepaw - Brown tabby tom with amber eyes (Son of Fawnheart and Turtleblaze)

Oakpaw - Brown tabby tom with green eyes (Son of Briarrose and Yarrowtail)

Rushpaw - Black tom with green eyes (Son of Briarrose and Yarrowtail)

Blossompaw - Tortoiseshell she-cat with amber eyes (Daughter of Briarrose and Yarrowtail)

Owlpaw - White and gray she-cat with pale blue eyes (Daughter of Briarrose and Yarrowtail)

QUEENS *(she-cats expecting or nursing kits)*

Squirreltail- Ginger she-cat with green eyes

Heatherflight- Light brown she-cat with green eyes

Sedgefern- Fluffy gray she-cat with green eyes, nursing Falconheart's kits (Juniperkit, gray she-cat, Oatkit, light golden brown tom and Thistlekit, spiky golden brown tom)

Dovepool- Silver tabby she-cat with blue eyes, nursing Mudfall's kits (Doekit, pale brown she-cat, Mintkit, pale gray tom and Acornkit, brown tom)

Petalbreeze- Silver she-cat with white tipped ears and blue eyes, expecting Burnclaw's kits

ELDERS *(former warriors and queens, now retired)*

Crowfur- Black she-cat with blue eyes

Rainears- Black she-cat with white ears and blue eyes

Icepetal- White she-cat with blue eyes

Snowtail- Fluffy white she-cat with blue eyes

Sandfoot- Calico she-cat with pale ginger colored paws and green eyes

ASHCLAN

LEADER Riverstar- Blue gray she-cat with blue eyes

DEPUTY Stormheart- Gray tom with dark green eyes

MEDICINE CAT Blackstorm - Black tom with blue eyes

WARRIORS

Harewhisker- Light brown tom

Silvermoon- Silver tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Haresong- Light brown she-cat with green eyes

Lilyclaw- Gray tabby she-cat with green eyes

Puddleclaw- Gray she-cat with green eyes

Skyfeather- Silver tabby tom with black markings and amber eyes
Apprentice, Otterpaw

Ravensong- Black tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Primroseheart - Mottled ginger she-cat with green eyes

Nightheart - Black she-cat with white paws and yellow eyes,

Leafdawn- Mottled brown she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Slatepaw

Dustfall- Pale brown tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Mistpaw

Rabbitspring- Pale brown and white she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Dewpaw

Hailfeather- Silver tabby she-cat with icy blue eyes
Apprentice, Russetpaw

Sageheart- Gray tabby tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Larchpaw

Graypelt - Gray tom with amber eyes

APPRENTICES

Slatepaw- Dark gray tom with amber eyes (Son of Silvermoon and Ashblaze)

Dewpaw- Pale gray she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Silvermoon and Ashblaze)

Mistpaw- Gray she-cat with pretty blue eyes (Daughter of Silvermoon and Ashblaze)

Otterpaw - Brown tom with green eyes (Son of Primroseheart and Dustfall)

Russetpaw - Mottled ginger tom with amber eyes (Son of Primroseheart and Dustfall)

Larchpaw - Brown tom with green eyes (Son of Primroseheart and Dustfall)

QUEENS

Tetra - Golden-brown tabby she-cat with green eyes, expecting Graypelt's kits.

ELDERS

Nightstorm- Dark gray tabby she-cat with green eyes

Crowstep- Gray tom with with black paws and amber eyes

Petalshine- Silver and white tabby she-cat

Foxfeather- Ginger tabby she-cat with green eyes

MOONCLAN

LEADER Shadowstar- Black tom with yellow eyes

DEPUTY Violetfur- Dark gray she-cat with bluish- purple eyes

MEDICINE CAT- Oneflight- Silver tabby tom with blue eyes

WARRIORS Swiftheart -Gray tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Minnowpaw

Tallsong - Dark gray she-cat with blue eyes

Apprentice, Ripplepaw

Ebonywing- Black she-cat with white paws and yellow eyes

Mosswind- Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes

Brokenclaw - Dark gray tabby tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Shellpaw

Icepool - White she-cat with dark blue eyes
Apprentice, Meadowpaw

Ashfeather- Black she-cat with blue eyes

Daisyheart- Silver tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Breezetail- Black and white tom with blue eyes

Rainpetal - Black she-cat with blue eyes eyes

Peachblossom- Cream she-cat with darker markings and green eyes

Berryheart- Ginger and cream colored she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Leopardpaw

Ferretpelt- Speckled brown and white tom with green eyes

Mothpool- White and gray she-cat with green eyes

Swanfeather- Fluffy white she-cat with blue eyes

APPRENTICES

Minnowpaw- Silver she-cat with blue eyes (Daughter of Mosswind and Swiftheart)

Shellpaw- Speckled gray tom with green eyes (Son of Mosswind and Swiftheart)

Meadowpaw- Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Mosswind and Swiftheart)

Leopardpaw - Cream and black she-cat with amber eyes (Daughter

of Peachblossom and Breezetail

Ripplepaw - Black tom with green eyes (Son of Peachblossom and Breezetail

ELDERS

Pigeonpelt- Light gray tom with pale yellow eyes

Feathercloud- Fluffy white she-cat with blue eyes

Frostfire- White she-cat with pale gray flecks and green eyes

Ravenwing - Pretty dark gray she-cat with dark blue eyes

Dovestorm - Light gray se-cat with pale blue eyes

LICHENCLAN

LEADER Timberstar- Brown tom with amber eyes

DEPUTY Larkclaw- Brown tabby she-cat with a white tipped tail.

MEDICINE CAT Roseheart- Pale ginger she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Emberpaw

WARRIORS Mudpelt- Dark brown tom with yellow eyes

Rowanwhisker- Dark red-brown she-cat with dark green eyes

Heatherwind- White and black she- cat with blue eyes
Apprentice, Marshpaw

Brackenheart- Red-brown tabby with a light brown chest
Apprentice, Pinepaw

Leafsong-Light brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Shrewpaw

Foxtail- Ginger tom with a white tail

Seedclaw-Elderly black and white tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Fennelpaw

Flowerheart- Pale brown she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Dapplepaw

Stumptail- Small brown tom with amber eyes

Kestrelwind- Brown she-cat with green eyes

Briarsong- Pale brown she-cat with green eyes

APPRENTICES

Emberpaw- Ginger she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Leafsong and Foxtail)

Dapplepaw Brown spotted tabby she-cat with green eyes (Son of Primroseheart and Dustfall)

Marshpaw - Brown she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Rowanwhisker and Stumptail)

Pinepaw - Red-brown tom with amber eyes (Son of Rowanwhisker and Stumptail)

Fennelpaw - Brown tabby tom with amber eyes (Son of Rowanwhisker and Stumptail)

Shrewpaw - Dark brown tom with green eyes (Son of Rowanwhisker and Stumptail)

ELDERS

Maplepool- Brown and cream she-cat with amber eyes

Mousethorn - Long haired brown tom with green eyes

MOUNTAINCLAN

LEADER Mountainstar - Brown she-cat with golden eyes

DEPUTY Nettleheart- Golden-brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Apprentice, Wrenpaw

MEDICINE CAT Mothflower - Brown she-cat with yellow eyes

WARRIORS

Troutstream- Brown tom with yellow eyes

Turnipclaw- Ginger tom with green eyes

Briarfall- Golden brown she-cat with amber eyes

Hazelspring - Golden brown she-cat with amber eyes

Riverstep - Dark gray she-cat with blue eyes

Dewleaf - Gray tabby tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Sparrowpaw

Fireclaw - Ginger tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Mossypaw

Sorrelfern - Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes

Spiderstorm - Black tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Finchpaw

Yewtail- Pale brown tom with green eyes

Antwhisker - Small black tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Petalpaw

Poppysong- Black she-cat with yellow eyes

Gingersky - Ginger she-cat with green eyes

Flintfoot - Skinny gray tom with yellow eyes

APPRENTICES

Finchpaw - Brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Wrenpaw- Red-brown she-cat with green eyes

Sparrowpaw - Brown tabby tom with green eyes

Mossypaw - Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes

Petalpaw - Ginger and white tabby she-cat with green eyes

Prologue

The stars were flawless, shimmering in the sky above as a cooling and gentle breeze rustled the plant life. Everything was so perfect here, and yet there was an increasing sense of doubt deep within the heart of Mosscloud, who traversed the starry hunting grounds of StarClan. She had spent countless seasons trapped outside of StarClan's borders, and she was finally back home with the cats she loved. She loved hearing all the stories of her Clan as well as the others. Everything seemed so perfect, but it didn't take Mosscloud long to see that darkness loomed on the horizon.

A meeting had been called by several medicine cats and Mosscloud was on her way. She padded quickly through the forest until she spotted the medicine cats at the meeting location. It was at the edge of the rushing river, several cats sat on the soft sandy bank of the river. She first recognized Skyclaw, an old MoonClan medicine cat as well as Ravenheart the medicine cat who trained Oneflight.

Representing LichenClan was Sagefeather and Barkclaw, representing SunClan was Feathernose and Honeywing and representing AshClan was Featherstorm and Eagleclaw. "Welcome, Mosscloud." Skyclaw dipped her head.

"Now why does MoonClan get three representatives?" Eagleclaw stared down Mosscloud who stood her ground. "Not to mention she hasn't been around for the past several seasons."

"She is not representing MoonClan, Eagleclaw." Featherstorm glared down at her former apprentice. *I'm not?* "She's representing MountainClan." *Oh.* She supposed it made sense, MountainClan had no ancestors.

"What we're talking about involves every Clan, including MountainClan. She is the best we have for a representative as she helped form the Clan." Skyclaw explained. "Take a seat, Mosscloud."

Mosscloud nodded, she had done her best to get to know the other

medicine cats, even if some of them had sour attitudes. She sat down, ignoring Eagleclaw's attitude and waited for them to begin speaking.

"I know that most all of you have had this feeling of unease." Featherstorm began. "I've been feeling it since before MountainClan arrived at the mountains. Though last night I had a horrible nightmare. It was pure darkness, I heard cats yowling in fury and the air was ripe with the scent of blood. I couldn't see anything, until a red light filled the sky. I looked up and the moon was blood red."

Mosscloud blood felt cold. *A blood moon? Surely that can't be good.* "I remember hearing stories of a blood moon when I was an apprentice," Featherstorm continued. "It served as a omen to a terrible battle. This was one of AshClan's darkest moments in history, the uprising led by Splashstar to reclaim AshClan from tyranny. It was the bloodiest battle the Clan had ever faced."

"So you think this is once again warning us of a violent battle?" Feathernose mewed.

"I believe so." Featherstorm nodded. "I'm not sure which Clans are under warning, but we need to exercise caution. If we're not careful the Clans could tear each other apart."

"Battles are a part of Clan life." Sagefeather spoke up. "They are inevitable."

"Not all battles are necessary." Honeywing mewed. "Sometimes they're driven by careless warriors who only thirst for blood." There was a sharp edge to Skyclaw's voice.

"I think we all know which Clan will be involved." Skyclaw muttered under his breath, but his eyes briefly glanced at the AshClan medicine cats.

"If you have something to say, then say it Skyclaw." Eagleclaw spat.

Skyclaw lifted his head and cleared his throat. "AshClan is always the root of violence, it *always* starts with them."

"I seem to recall a particular period in MoonClan's history when they assaulted LichenClan over and over." Sagefeather flicked her tail.

"There is no need to go around accusing everyone." Feathernose raised his voice. "Violence can stem from any Clan. Thornstar was from SunClan and caused one of the most violent battles in the forest, not to mention Elmstar's assault on SunClan. Every Clan is capable of violence and arguing amongst ourselves isn't going to help prevent this battle."

"Feathernose is right." Barkclaw mewed. "AshClan and SunClan currently have a truce and there hasn't been so much as a border skirmish since Echoheart's attack, and the Clans came together during that time. If we can warn our medicine cats then we can avoid this battle."

Mosscloud suddenly saw a flash of white as a massive, pure white owl appeared in the sky. Her eyes went wide as the owl's haunting screech sounded, but it only made noise from within her own head. She felt her body freeze as she witnessed the owl.

"Mosscloud?" Ravenheart rose to his paws. "Are you alright?"

"I saw...." Mosscloud struggled to regain her stability, the owl's cry still vivid in her mind and her ears ringing. "An owl." She shook her head, and another image entered her mind. *Of course.* "We have to give Owlpaw this message."

"The SunClan apprentice?" Featherstorm tilted her head.

"Yes, Owlpaw must be the cat to receive this message."

"She's just an apprentice, and she's been a medicine cat for less than two moons." Sagefeather pointed out.

"Please do not forget what Owlpaw did. Owlpaw was the one who convinced Mountainstar to speak to StarClan and she guided and helped to train Mothflower. She saved lives on her mission and she has been forced to have a lot of experience. Plus, this very well could be the reason that MountainClan was formed. They could

play a part in preventing this violent battle."

"But Owlpaw is a SunClan cat, not a MountainClan cat."
"True, but she will always be connected to them."

"I believe Mosscloud." Featherstorm lifted her head. "We should deliver the message to Owlpaw, she is clearly an important cat. Mosscloud may be new, but she is far older than all of us. We must respect her."

"Thank you, Featherstorm." Mosscloud dipped her head.

"Very well then." Skyclaw bowed his head. "We can deliver this message to Owlpaw. I just hope that she's not too young to handle this burden."

"She's already handled more than any of us." Ravenheart replied. "She can handle this as well, and she is not alone."

"We will figure out a way to deliver this message to Owlpaw,." Featherstorm mewed. "But if we don't act soon enough, I fear that the Clans we love will be driven to destruction delivered by their own claws."

Chapter 1

Owlpaw focused on the massive spread of herbs lying before her paws. She looked over each of them with interest, waiting for Honeyfrost to start quizzing her. Off to the side of the medicine cat den watching with interest was Pebblestep. "Are you ready, Owlpaw?" Honeyfrost checked. "I want you to answer as quickly as you can. This is an assessment so I want you to be quick and accurate."

"I'm ready." Owlpaw held her head high, she was determined to get this right.

"Find the lungwort." Honeyfrost instructed. Owlpaw's blue eyes instantly began scanning the large selection of herbs. *Lungwort...* She scanned over each herb as she searched her brain trying to pick out which herb was lungwort. Eventually her eyes rested on dark green leaves with gray speckles.

"There." Owlpaw gently touched the herb with her paw.

"Good." Honeyfrost praised. "Now can you tell me what it does?"

Owlpaw suddenly realized that her mind was drawing a complete blank. "Lungwort uh..." She tried desperately to remember but her head was completely empty. "I'm sorry," She dropped her head in shame. "I forgot."
"There's no need to apologize, Owlpaw." Honeyfrost assured her. "Lungwort isn't that common of a herb. Lungwort is used to treat yellowcough. We've only ever had one case of yellowcough but I try to keep it available just in case it happens again. The only place to find lungwort is in MoonClan territory. Shadowstar has given us permission to get the herb, but sometimes we just ask Oneflight to bring it to us."

Owlpaw listened in tently. "I will do my best to remember that." Owlpaw recited in her mind over and over that lungwort was used for yellowcough.

"Let's keep going." Honeyfrost mewed and Owlpaw turned her attention back to the herb selection. "Find parsley."

Parsley? Owlpaw couldn't remember ever learning about parsley. She started to feel a sense of panic. *Have we talked about parsley? Or did I just forget?* She rapidly looked over each and every herb but they all seemed to blur together.

"It's okay if you don't know it, Owlpaw." Honeyfrost spoke up, slowing down Owlpaw's panic. "You don't need to know everything right away, that's why we're training you." *Right.* Owlpaw took a deep breath, trying to relax. "This is parsley." Honeyfrost gently nudged the herb with her paw. "I find it best to recognize by its sharp scent."

Owlpaw leaned forward and gave the herb a sniff, it did have a very sharp smell to it. "What is it used for?"

"Parsley stops a queen's milk from coming, this is usually used in the case of a mother losing her kits. We had to give it to Heatherflight when she lost her kits. We don't use it very often."

Owlpaw did her best to memorize the herb by both is appearance as well its scent. *I can remember this.* She told herself and turned her attention back to Honeyfrost. "Now try finding wild garlic."

Owlpaw knew wild garlic from its very distinct smell. She easily pointed it out. "Now what is it used for?"

"Helps prevent infection."

"Good, it's also very good for rat bites if you don't have burdock with you." Honeyfrost explained and Owlpaw took another mental note. "How about elder leaves?"

Owlpaw had a vague memory of elder leaves but she did her best to keep calm and look over all the herbs until she finally spotted them. She pointed them out with her paw. "Very good. The use?"

Owlpaw couldn't remember the exact use of the herb. "Um...it's used for treating wounds." She made her best guess but she felt that she was wrong.

"Not quite." Honeyfrost shook her head. "Elder leaves are chewed into a poultice and used to treat sprains." Now that Honeyfrost had something Owlpaw remembered, she silently scolded herself for not remembering.

"Perhaps I shouldn't be teaching you the more advanced herbs. You had a lot of training on your journey but it's clear that you still have a lot to learn aside from basic herbs. Why don't you study the herbs we talked about today. Your assessment is over."

Owlpaw felt her heart drop into her belly. *I failed my assessment.* She lowered her head, she had only got one answer right and even then she missed part of the uses. *I learned so much on the journey so why does it feel like I'm just starting out.*

She lifted her head and looked over at Honeyfrost and Pebblestep who were putting away the extra herbs and talking quietly to themselves. "Pebblestep is going to collect some herbs and I'm going to go check on Petalbreeze. Keep reviewing those herbs until I get back."

"Okay." Owlpaw dipped her head and turned her attention back to the herbs, reciting them in her head over and over. *Lungwort for yellow cough. Parsley to stop a queen's milk. Garlic for infection and rat bites. Elder leaves for sprains. Lungwort for yellow cough. Parsley to stop a queen's milk. Garlic for infection and rat bites. Elder leaves for sprains.* She recited the herbs over and over until it was dug into her brain.

After a while of studying Honeyfrost returned. "How goes it?"

"I think I'm getting it. "Lungwort for yellow cough. Parsley to stop a queen's milk. Garlic for infection and rat bites. Elder leaves for sprains."

"Good." Honeyfrost purred. "I knew you'd get it eventually. Why don't you take a break. I saw Blossompaw coming back from training, why don't you go see her?"

Part of Owlpaw wanted to keep studying, but she did want to see her sister. "Alright." Owlpaw put the herbs away neatly and stepped

outside into the SunClan camp. It was nearing sundown and the Clan was starting to settle down for the night. Just as Honeyfrost had said, Blossompaw was talking with her mentor, Mudfall after returning from her training.

Owlpaw waited until Blossompaw was done talking with her mentor to approach. Mudfall finished up his conversation then turned to head to the nursery, presumably to see his kits. "Hey there." Owlpaw greeted her sister as she padded up to her.

"Hi." Blossompaw's eyes lit up upon seeing her sister. "What's up?"

"Just wondering if you wanted to share some prey."

"Of course." Blossompaw purred, her tail waving happily. "Are you done with your training?" She questioned as the two sisters walked over to the fresh-kill pile.

"For now." Owlpaw replied with a slight sigh. Blossompaw picked up a squirrel for the two of them to share.

"Is everything okay?" Blossompaw questioned, her eyes showing a twinge of concern.

"Yeah," Owlpaw looked down at the floor. "I'm just struggling a lot more than I thought I would, I guess. I thought I learned a lot on my journey and that being a medicine cat would come so much easier to me than being a warrior did, but I'm still struggling. I keep forgetting herbs and their uses."

"It's okay to struggle, Owlpaw." Blossompaw nudged her sister gently. "We all struggle, I was really struggling while you were gone. I held myself to a high standard and overworked myself. I didn't learn anything from it. Don't push yourself, Owlpaw. You are already an incredible medicine cat and you have all the time in the world. There's no need to rush, trust me." Blossompaw touched her muzzle to Owlpaw's cheek. "Plus you're not alone, we're all here to help you."

Owlpaw felt warmed by her sister's words and she let out a purr, giving her sister a gentle nuzzle. "Thank you, Blossompaw. I don't

know what I would do without you."

"You're welcome." Blossompaw rested her tail across Owlpaw's shoulders and the two of them continued eating. Owlpaw knew that she shouldn't be so hard on herself, but after failing miserably as a warrior apprentice she didn't want to repeat that, she wanted to be the best medicine cat she could be. She had learned a lot on her journey and even had to mentor Mothflower, the MountainClan medicine cat for a short period of time.

I'm only nine moons old. Owlpaw reminded herself. *I'm still very young and I need to remember this. Like Blossompaw said, I have all the time in the world.*

Chapter 2

"Good morning, Mountainstar." Mountainstar's ears twitched as she stepped out of her den and heard a friendly voice. She looked towards the direction of the call and noticed Spiderstorm padding towards her with Sparrowpaw close behind him. The young tom had excitement burning in his eyes.

"Good morning you two." Mountainstar purred, greeting the two toms. "What can I help you with?"

"All of us mentors want to hold the first assessment for our apprentices but I just wanted to double check with you what exactly we're supposed to do."

Mountainstar thought for a moment. "The way Earthpelt described it was that the apprentices will go hunting and you will monitor them but make sure to stay hidden. You will judge the apprentices based on how well they hunt, not just based on how much they catch either."

"Got it, thank you." Spiderstorm dipped his head.

"I'm so excited!" Sparrowpaw padded forward, waving his tail happily. "I've gotten so good at hunting."

"Well I'll be looking forward to hearing about how well you've done." Mountainstar purred. "Good luck."

Sparrowpaw's eyes shimmered and he left alongside with his mentor, meeting up with the other apprentices and mentors. Mountainstar felt pride rushing into her heart, the three kits that she raised as her own were turning into true warriors. She couldn't wait to finally give them their warrior names and she already had them picked out. She was equally excited to make Petalpaw and Mossypaw warriors as well.

She had also noticed that many of the cats within MountainClan

were getting closer to each other, namely Riverstep and Antwhisker. The two cats were always hunting together and spending time together and Mountainstar couldn't help but wonder if they would soon have kits.

The first kits born in our new home. Mountainstar thought proudly. It hadn't even been two moons yet but MountainClan had really found their way in this forest. Mountainstar couldn't help but feel a sharp sense of pride. *It's strange to think that three moons ago I never even considered this way of life.*

"Good morning, Mountainstar." A new voice spoke and she turned her head to spot the MountainClan deputy Nettleheart limping towards her. Since arriving in their new home, Nettleheart had been the closest cat to Mountainstar. She couldn't be happier that she selected the she-cat to be her deputy.

"Good morning." Mountainstar purred, dipping her head. "Aren't you joining the other mentors for the apprentice's assessment."

"I am, I told them I would catch up. I just wanted to relay the patrols planned for while I'm gone to you in case anyone had any questions."

"Oh, perfect." Mountainstar mewed. "What do I need to know?"

"The dawn patrol should be returning here shortly, when they get back I have Troutstream leading a hunting patrol with Riverstep, Poppysong and Flintfoot. The sun high patrol will go along the MoonClan border and is led by Fireclaw alongside Gingersky, Hazelspring, Antwhisker and Briarfall."

"Wonderful." Mountainstar dipped her head. "Thank you, Nettleheart. Good luck with the assessment." With a wave of her tail, Nettleheart padded off and vanished into the forest. Mountainstar took a look around the camp and mostly saw that her Clanmates were preparing for their upcoming patrols. *I don't think they'll need to check with me at all.* Mountainstar thought with a rush of pride.

While she hadn't seen the other Clans working, she couldn't help

but feel that her Clan was moving together as if they had all been born warriors. She was very proud of the progress they had made, and she was excited to report that at the gathering tonight.

Mountainstar felt a breeze pick up and her body shivered, leaf-bare was nearly upon them and while she felt a twinge of anxiety about the upcoming season, she had faith in her Clan. No longer did these cats have to huddle alone during the harsh snowy nights, they had dens and Clanmates to keep them warm and hunt for them, and they had Mothflower to keep them healthy.

Mountainstar decided to check on the young medicine cat to see if she was doing alright in her preparations for the upcoming season. While the warriors of MountainClan seemed to be settling in just fine, Mothflower still doubted herself a lot. Mountainstar knew there was a lot more to being a medicine cat than there was a warrior, but she also had faith in her.

Mountainstar padded over to the medicine cat den which was just under hers. She peered inside and was greeted by the tangy scent of herbs. She spotted Mothflower in the back of the den, her brown pelt shrouded by the shadows of the dimly lit den. "Good morning, Mothflower." Mountainstar called into the den.

Mothflower jumped slightly but turned around to look at Mountainstar. "Oh, good morning Mountainstar." She dipped her head. "Was there something you needed help with?"

"I just wanted to check on you, actually. Have you been preparing for leaf-bare?"

"As best I can." Mothflower sighed. "The others told me that the most important herb during this season is catmint but I can't seem to find enough of it. I have a small amount but not nearly enough based on how urgent it was described to be by the other medicine cats." There was panic brewing in her yellow eyes.

"You can always ask them again tonight, Mothflower."

"Oh right," Mothflower took a deep breath. "I forgot that the gathering was tonight. Oneflight told me how dangerous

greencough can be, I'm worried that I won't have enough. We don't have a lot of warriors as is and I don't want to risk losing any of our cats to sickness."

"We'll be okay, Mothflower." Mountainstar purred, resting her tail across the medicine cat's shoulders. "I remember being told by Leafdawn that greencough is more dangerous to elders and kits, which we don't have any right now. Even my kits are nearly eight moons by now. We'll be okay and we can always ask for help."

Mothflower looked Mountainstar in the eye, but she wasn't sure that her words helped that much. *I don't know what to do to help Mothflower find her confidence as a medicine cat.* "Thank you, Mountainstar. I will talk to the other medicine cats tonight."

"You can do this, Mothflower. I know you can."

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Mountainstar faced the gathering hollow and took a deep breath. She still wasn't quite used to sitting up there with the rest of the leaders, some of which have been leading for many seasons. They all had a certain regal energy to them and Mountainstar wasn't sure she had that same energy.

Regardless, Mountainstar pressed forward and led her Clan into the hollow. Most Clans seemed to have already gathered with the exception of AshClan. MountainClan worked their way into the hollow and soon dispersed to talk to the other Clans. While Mountainstar knew that not everyone cat in the forest was used to a fifth Clan living in the territories, she could also see that her Clan was welcomed by the rest. Especially by the cats who led them here.

Mountainstar was eager to see how Owlpaw was doing with her training, but before she could she caught movement from the corner of her eye and saw Timberstar padding up to her. "Good evening." Mountainstar dipped her head respectfully.

"To you as well." Timberstar gave her a nod. "I wanted to speak with you before the gathering began, I don't want to make a big

deal of this."

Mountainstar felt a twinge of anxiety in her chest but she stayed calm in front of the LichenClan leader. "Of course, what is it?"

"Some of my warriors caught MountainClan scent over the border. It wasn't a lot and just over the border. I understand that some of your warriors are still adjusting to their new lives so I won't be too harsh. I just wanted to ask if you could discuss this with them."

"Of course, Timberstar." Mountainstar responded. "I will speak with them right away, thank you for telling me."

"It's no problem." Timberstar nodded. "I will also be having my warriors strengthen the scent lines, this isn't a display of aggression but rather to help your warriors learn our scent better."

"Thank you again, Timberstar. We deeply appreciate your understanding while we adjust."

Timberstar dipped his head once more before returning to his Clanmates. Mountainstar thought for a moment, wondering which of her warriors it could've been. She was certain that it was just a mistake and she would talk to them after the gathering.

Not long after Timberstar left, AshClan arrived and it was time for the gathering to begin. Mountainstar took a deep breath and took her place on the rock. She shuffled her paws slightly as all the eyes were on them.

"I'll go ahead and start." Riverstar mewed, the fierce AshClan leader raised her head. Mountainstar couldn't help but feel slightly intimidated by Riverstar. "We don't have a lot to report, but Tetra has moved into the nursery expecting Graypelt's kits." There was a moment of soft purrs to welcome to the new queen. "We are more than prepared for the upcoming season and AshClan is as always, strong."

"New kits are always good news." Timberstar spoke up. "I will go ahead and go next. We recently welcomed Dapplepool as our newest warrior." Cheers rang out for the new LichenClan warrior.

"You may go next, Mountainstar."

Mountainstar's chest tightened slightly, she wasn't used to this yet but she held her high and kept her voice clear. "We are very much fitting into our new role as warriors, we're still learning but I am incredibly proud of the progress that these cats have made." She noticed the MountainClan cats in the crowd holding their heads high and their eyes shimmering with joy and pride, Mountainstar felt a purr rise in her chest.

"That is wonderful to hear." Dawnstar spoke with a purr. "SunClan does not have a lot to report but our Clan is as strong as ever and we are prepared for the cold season."

Once Dawnstar finished it was time for Shadowstar. "We also welcome a new queen into the nursery, Rainpetal. Other than that we have no news to announce."

"That was an easy gathering and its not too cold yet, we have time to enjoy each other's company." Dawnstar suggested and the leaders jumped down. Mountainstar was glad that the gathering had been smooth. She looked over her Clan proudly as they made friends with the others. *I'm so proud of them. We'll fit in just fine.*

Chapter 3

Blossompaw looked around as the gathering came to a close. The five leaders hopped down and the various Clans began to converse with each other. On either side of Blossompaw was Rushpaw and Oakpaw, she wished that she could sit with Owlpaw but her sister was over with the medicine cats. She peered through the crowd and spotted her sister talking with the MountainClan medicine cat Mothflower as well as their leader.

It felt strange watching her sister talk to another Clan leader, even if they had gone on their journey together Owlpaw seemed very relaxed around them. She knew that Owlpaw missed Mountainstar deeply and would constantly wonder about them, but it seemed like MountainClan was doing just fine on their own. Blossompaw hoped that this would help Owlpaw relax and focus more on her own Clan.

Another set of conversing cats also caught Blossompaw's attention, she noticed Shadowstar and Riverstar talking quietly, both of them looked tense and while Shadowstar's back was to Blossompaw she could tell that Riverstar seemed very irritated. She shrugged it off, not sure exactly what to make it of it and turned her attention away.

Blossompaw wasn't sure who else to talk to, she didn't have a lot of friends from other Clans so she decided to see if she could hang out with Owlpaw after she was done talking to the others. She awkwardly padded up to her, wondering if she should even approach a Clan leader. As she grew closer to the three of them Owlpaw noticed her and turned to face her with a happy expression.

"Hi, Blossompaw." Owlpaw purred. "This is Mountainstar and Mothflower." She introduced eagerly.

"Hi," Blossompaw felt even more awkward that she was an apprentice casually meeting a Clan leader. "It's nice to meet you."

"You as well." Mountainstar purred. "Owlpaw talked a lot about you before we came here."

She did? Blossompaw thought with a purr, happy that her sister still thought about her when she was so far away. "She talks a lot about you too."

Owlpaw looked down bashfully. "I just worry." She said nervously and Blossompaw let out a purr of amusement.

"Why don't you go spend time with your sister, Owlpaw." Mountainstar suggested. "We'll see you at the next gathering."

"Alright." Owlpaw purred before turning to Mothflower who had stayed quiet this entire time. "I suggest you ask more questions to the older medicine cats. I'm still just an apprentice and have a lot to learn just like you do."

"Well thank you anyway, Owlpaw." Mothflower dipped her head, her voice was incredibly soft and quiet voice, Blossompaw could barely hear her. "Have a good rest of your night."

"You too." Owlpaw replied with a wave of her tail. "I'll see you at the half-moon." Owlpaw said goodbye one last time to the MountainClan cats and turned around, walking away with Blossompaw.

"It's weird that you're so familiar with a Clan leader." Blossompaw pointed out.

"Is it?" Owlpaw tilted her head. "I am a medicine cat after all, and our relationship is a bit different than anyone else's. Considering the journey we went on together."

"I suppose, there's nothing wrong with it it's just strange to see an apprentice with a leader from a different Clan."

"I never really thought about it, I knew Mountainstar before she was a leader and she's always been a good friend." Owlpaw shrugged, clearly not bothered by it. Blossompaw couldn't help but notice how much more confident Owlpaw seemed in herself. She struggled with her medicine cat duties, but she was a lot more sure of who she

was. It made Blossompaw proud.

As the two of them walked together, talking about their training and other Clan things Owlpaw stopped as she noticed something. Blossompaw stopped as well and looked in the same direction and saw a dark gray tom, it was Slatepaw of AshClan.

Owlpaw seemed hesitant for a moment but she took a deep breath and padded forward. "Hi, Slatepaw." She greeted. The AshClan tom turned around and gave Owlpaw a confused look.

"What do you want?" Slatepaw replied with a slight growl to his tone, Blossompaw's tail twitched. *What gives him the right to be so rude?* She wondered.

"I-I just wanted to say hi. I haven't really seen you since we got back from the journey."

"Probably because we're from different Clans." Slatepaw said in a mocking tone. "I know we went on this big life changing journey together, or whatever, but let me make this clear. We are *not* friends, we never were friends and we never will be. I have no interest in having some scared, weak, little SunClan apprentice in my life."

Blossompaw let out a hiss and stepped forward, ahead of Owlpaw. "What's your problem?"

Slatepaw turned his attention to Blossompaw, his amber eyes burning. "My *problem* is her. She was annoying on the trip and she's annoying now."

"I seem to recall a story she told where she saved your tail from a dog." Blossompaw sneered.

Slatepaw flattened his ears and snarled. "I was fine on my own without her help."

"Clearly." Blossompaw scoffed. "Now I'm sure you're some big tough AshClan tom but it doesn't give you a right to act like a foxheart to the cats around you."

"I can act however I want." Slatepaw spat. "I'm not gonna have two little SunClan apprentices tell me what to do."

Blossompaw's ear twitched. "You keep calling us apprentices as an insult but I don't recall you becoming a warrior." Slatepaw let out a growl. "You're quite a bit older than us shouldn't you be a warrior already? Especially after that big journey, maybe Riverstar just thinks you're not good enough."

"You don't know what you're talking about!" Slatepaw stepped forward, his claws extending and his eyes burning with anger. *So he's really sensitive about that.* Blossompaw flicked her tail. "What's the matter? Big strong AshClan apprentice isn't good enough to become a warrior?"

"You better knock it off before I swipe that smug look of your face."

"I'd like to see you try." Blossompaw stepped closer, both them with their teeth bared and claws unsheathed.

"Stop it!" Owlpaw jumped between the two of them, making Owlpaw step back. "We're at a gathering, we're under a truce." She looked between the two of them. Blossompaw had briefly forgotten about the gathering and stepped back, letting her body relax. "We're leaving you alone now, Slatepaw." Owlpaw growled and turned away, nudging Blossompaw forward.

"I'm sorry, Owlpaw." Blossompaw mewed. "That tom is just so frustratingly arrogant."

"Trust me, I know." Owlpaw sighed. "I spent a lot of time with him and he was just as bad. I don't why I thought I could be friends with him, I figured things had gotten better by the end of the journey but clearly I was wrong."

"He's not worth being friends with." Blossompaw replied, rolling her eyes. "He's only cares about himself."

"I know that now." Owlpaw looked at her sister with soft eyes. "It was pretty funny when you pointed out he wasn't a warrior yet. He was so certain that he would be a warrior once he got back." The

two sisters shared a laugh together and started heading back to meet up with the rest of SunClan.

Blossompaw easily shoved Slatepaw out of her thoughts, all she wanted to think about was how happy she was to have her sister home and how excited she was that the two of them could grow and learn together.

Chapter 4

Slatepaw crept through the forest, making sure that every pawstep was silent and his prey was completely oblivious to the danger he presented. He could see the squirrel just a few taillengths away from Slatepaw's claws. He let out a silent breath to steady his body, making sure that he was intently focused on this catch.

He shifted his weight into his haunches and put his strength into a mighty leap forward. With claws extended, his paws landed cleanly on the squirrel, pinning the plump red squirrel to the forest floor and killing it with a clean bite to the neck. *Perfect.* Slatepaw thought with a swipe of his tail. *Every time.*

"Good work, Slatepaw." His ears twitched when he heard the voice of his mentor, Leafdawn, approach. Her mottled brown pelt coming into view. "The assessment is done, let's meet up with your sisters."

Slatepaw gave his mentor a nod then the two of them worked together to gather all the prey he had caught. As usual, Slatepaw caught a bountiful amount even though the air had been getting colder with each passing day. He confidently carried his catch back to the training area. He and Leafdawn arrived last and he saw his sisters, Mistpaw and Dewpaw sitting with their mentors Ravensong and Rabbitspring.

Mistpaw had four pieces of prey at her paws while Dewpaw had three, both paling in comparison to Slatepaw's six. He knew that his sisters were good hunters, but he would always outshine them. He sat down next to Mistpaw and awaited Leafdawn's approval. There was no way that he would fail this assessment and by the end of the day, at long last he would have his warrior name.

Slatepaw briefly recalled how Blossompaw, ridiculed him about his lack of a warrior name but he refused to let some lowly SunClan apprentice get under his skin. While he agreed that he should've been made a warrior as soon as he returned from the journey, he couldn't change the past, only his future.

"I'll go ahead and start." Ravensong spoke up. "Mistpaw, you did an incredible job while hunting. You remained focused and you stayed silent, not letting a single piece of prey escape. You have truly earned your place here in AshClan. You pass."

"I'll go next." Rabbitspring said, her voice small and timid. Slatepaw didn't know how such a skittish she-cat earned her warrior name, but it wasn't his place to question Riverstar's choices. *Not yet, anyway.* "Dewpaw you also did an incredible job hunting today. I am proud of the fine warrior that you have grown into and I know that the rest of the Clan will be proud of you as well."

"Thank you, Rabbitspring." Dewpaw purred softly.

"And finally, it's my turn." Leafdawn rose to her paws and faced Slatepaw with an intense expression. "Slatepaw you showed me on your very first day as an apprentice that you had a natural talent for being a warrior. Yet you had all the fiery arrogance of a fox. You still have that arrogance today, but I do believe that you learned a lot on the journey we took together. I still think that you need to work on your attitude, I believe that your skills will be an incredible benefit to AshClan. You pass."

There was no relief to be felt because Slatepaw knew that he already passed, Leafdawn would have to be a mouse-brained fool to keep as an apprentice for any longer. He already had the skills of a full grown warrior, he was certain he could fight most of the warriors in AshClan or any other Clan for that matter.

"Let's return to camp now." Ravensong mewed, standing up along with the others. "Riverstar doesn't like to waste time." Slatepaw stood up as well, he and Leafdawn carrying his prey back to the AshClan camp.

While he stayed composed and stoic, Slatepaw did feel a sense of excitement about finally earning his warrior name. He would finally not be restricted by a mentor, he would no longer have to do menial tasks such as removing ticks from the elders, he would have his own freedom to finally show AshClan what he could do.

The group of mentors and apprentices finally reached the AshClan

camp and set their catches down on the fresh-kill pile while the mentors padded towards Riverstar's den so they could deliver the news. Slatepaw sat down with his sisters beside the apprentice den as they waited.

"Isn't this so exciting, Slatepaw?" Mistpaw mewed, nuding the dark gray tom. "We're finally becoming warriors."

"Took long enough." Slatepaw scoffed. "I should've been made a warrior a long time ago."

"I know you're this amazing warrior and you went on a super important journey," Dewpaw added with an amused purr. "But you do still have to be trained." She gave him a gentle prod with her paw. Slatepaw withheld a growl. He knew that neither of his sisters took being a warrior as serious as he did, and while he didn't think less of them for that it was clear how different their goals were. *They just want to serve their Clans, I want to be the strongest warrior in the forest, and I know I will be.*

"Slatepaw," A sudden voice pulled him out of his thoughts, he looked up to see the AshClan medicine cat, Blackstorm, standing before him. *What does he want.* "Can I borrow your paws for a moment?"

"Why me?" Slatepaw narrowed his eyes.

Blackstorm's tail twitched irritably. "Because you're the one I asked."

"I'm about to be made a warrior," Slatepaw mewed sternly. "I don't take orders from a medicine cat anymore."

"Is that so?" Blackstorm rolled his icy blue eyes. "I've dealt with arrogant warriors before and you're nothing special because you've got some special skills to hunt and fight well."

Slatepaw felt a spark of annoyance in his chest, wondering what Blackstorm thought gave him the authority to treat him this way. "I'm more of an AshClan cat than you'll ever be. You're too scared to fight and too stupid to hunt so you decided to spend your life picking flowers while us warriors risk our lives to keep you safe."

"Oh I've heard this before." Blackstorm looked bored and uninterested which angered Slatepaw even more. "You warriors are all the same, so self absorbed that you think claws are the answer to everything."

"If it's the answer you want I'll be sure to show it to you." Slatepaw stepped forward, baring his teeth and extending his claws. "You sure have a sharp tongue but I'll show you what a *warrior* is capable of." Slatepaw was clearly visibly stronger than Blackstorm, his broad shoulders and muscular body were clear signs that Slatepaw could *easily* show the medicine cat who he needed to respect, and yet Blackstorm didn't seem phased or threatened at all, this just deepend Slatepaw's anger.

"*Slatepaw!"* A rage filled mew sounded and Slatepaw broke his gaze away from Blackstorm, looking past the medicine cat where he saw Leafdawn standing with the other two mentors as well as Riverstar. Leafdawn faced Slatepaw with sheer anger in her eyes. "I knew you were arrogant but do I really see you *threatening* a Clanmate?"

Before Slatepaw could speak, Blackstorm turned around to answer instead. "I dared to disrespect the great and mighty Slatepaw by asking him to help me with a simple favor, and the only thing rattling around his thick head is violence."

Slatepaw let out a hiss on instinct, causing Leafdawn to shoot forward and shove Slatepaw to the side, he landed on his shoulder but quickly recovered and faced his mentor, his fur puffing up and his claws scraping against the stone floor of the camp. "I cannot believe you, Slatepaw." Leafdawn's voice was seething with anger. "I knew you were arrogant, I knew that you were quick to violence but I *never* thought you would threaten violence against your own medicine cat, against your own Clanmate. You are a *disgrace* to this Clan and everything that I taught you."

Slatepaw's ears flattened and he lowered his body to the ground as Leafdawn berated him, all of AshClan had taken notice and were watching. "I requested that Riverstar send us on that journey in hopes that it would help you mature and gain a sense of humility, and for a moment I thought you did but I see now that I was wrong. I have never in my life felt such disappointment and guilt. Clearly I

failed you as a mentor if I couldn't even teach you basic respect of your Clanmates."

Slatepaw couldn't say anything, there was a storm of emotions raging in his mind and heart. He had never seen Leafdawn this mad before, and there was an unsettling feeling brewing in his stomach. "You may have the skills, but you do not have the mental maturity it takes to be an AshClan warrior and that's why--" Leafdawn took a deep breath. "That's why I am taking back what I said. Slatepaw, you will not become a warrior until prove to me that you can show your Clanmates some respect and until you stop being so self absorbed. Your warrior ceremony is not happening today."

Anger and shocked snapped inside of Slatepaw and he rose to his paws, feeling like he could scream and fight. The feelings inside of him were burning like a fire, catching in his throat making his voice shake as he spoke. "You can't do that!" Slatepaw roared. "You're not a leader! You can't take this ceremony away from me! I worked harder than any cat in this Clan to get here! I am the strongest apprentice this Clan has ever seen!"

"You may be strong," This time it was Riverstar who spoke, stepping forward to stand beside Leafdawn. The look in Riverstar's eyes was something completely different, but it made Slatepaw feel unease in his heart. "But you lack a severe understanding of what it means to be an AshClan warrior. I was like you once, thinking that I deserved whatever I wanted, and because of it I hurt the ones around me the most." Her eyes briefly traveled to Mistpaw and Dewpaw before returning to Slatepaw. "It is not the leader's job to decide when an apprentice is ready to earn their warrior name, it is the mentor's, and if your mentor does not want you to become a warrior then I will not make you one. You will not be having your ceremony along with your sisters. You will not be made a warrior today."

Slatepaw stood is a stunned silence, his body trembling with anger. He felt betrayed, he felt like he was being cheated as every cat in the Clan looked at him like he was a failure. He clenched his jaw and his claws scraped harder against the stone. "I wish that you would have never been made my mentor." He looked up, glaring at Leafdawn. *This is her fault.* "I hate you!" He roared before turning on his paws and running into the pine trees.

He didn't know which direction he was running, he just kept going. The world around him faded into a blur as his paws beat against the forest floor, kicking up rocks and pine needles as he ran with all of his might. He could hear his heart pounding in his ears, he wasn't sure he had ever run this fast. The anger and pain he felt was fueling his energy, making his legs move faster.

He ran for a long time, he wasn't sure how far he was but eventually his vision came back into focus he realized he was nearing the edge of AshClan territory, near where the Clans first stepped into the new territories. Slatepaw skidded to a stop and finally stopped. His heart was pounding heavily in his chest and his breathing was heavy, his legs aching slightly. He didn't realize he had ran this far.

The running left him exhausted but it helped him to numb his thoughts, the anger that he felt still burned deeply in his chest. The humiliation that he had endured as his entire Clan watched both Leafdawn and Riverstar tear him down. Slatepaw let his body give on him as he laid down in a pile of pine needles, his eyes closed and without thinking he let sleep take him.

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Slatepaw's body was cold and stiff when he woke up in the morning, he still felt a smoldering anger inside of him but he knew that running away from AshClan wasn't the option. He begrudgingly rose to his paws and started the long walk back to camp. When he finally arrived, all the AshClan cats seemed to notice him. He kept his expression stoic and did his best to ignore them, but there was one cat that he couldn't get away with ignoring; his mother.

Silvermoon approached him with concern in your eyes. "I was worried sick about you, Slatepaw. You never came home last night."

"I'm aware." Slatepaw grumbled. "I needed to think."

Silvermoon sighed. "You know your father was arrogant, especially when he was an apprentice." Slatepaw's ears twitched, wondering why she thought it was necessary to bring up Ashblaze, he died when Slatepaw was only a kit he had little to no memories of him.

"He thought he could win any fight and thought that he was better than the cats around him. However, when it really mattered to him he eventually grew up. It wasn't his raw talent that earned him the position of deputy, it was his loyalty and dedication to his Clanmates. Ashblaze had to learn that he wasn't above his Clanmates, he was equal to them."

"Is that supposed to make me feel better?" Slatepaw replied, keeping his voice low.

"No." Silvermoon shook her head. "I'm telling you this in hopes that you'll soon realize that you too, need to grow up." His mother's stern and blunt words struck at him like a set of razor sharp claws. "You should go congratulate Mistflight and Dewleaf." Hearing their warrior names even worsened the emotional wounds he felt.

"I will later." Slatepaw growled and walked away from his mother towards the apprentice den, it was empty inside thankfully and he flopped down into his nest. *I shouldn't be in here. I should have my warrior name too.* His claws began to angrily tear at the lining of his nest. *I can't let this destroy me. I will get my warrior name, I will prove to this Clan that I am still the strongest cat in the Clan. No matter what.*

Chapter 5

The moon shed its brilliant light across the moorland, providing the night patrol with the vision they needed to traverse their territory. MoonClan apprentice, Leopardpaw padded alongside her mentor, Berryheart. Ahead of her was the deputy of her clan, Violetfur as well as Mosswind, Daisyheart and Ashfeather.

The night was silent, only the distant sound of the flowing rivers and crickets chirping. Leopardpaw loved beautiful nights like this, even if the chilly air was biting at her ear-tips and nose, she still felt so at home shrouded in the darkness with the moon to guide them. She held her head high and walked with purpose as the patrol neared the river. They didn't have a border on this side, but Shadowstar had instructed the patrol to check it anyway, Leopardpaw wasn't sure why.

Violetfur led the way towards the river with the patrol making quick pace behind her. They approached the river bed and Violetfur started moving faster, making longer strides towards the river. She signaled with her tail for the rest of the patrol to wait. "What do you think is going on?" Mosswind questioned Ashfeather, keeping her voice low. "We don't usually spend much time on the river border like this."

"I'm not sure." Ashfeather slowly shook her head. "But Shadowstar has been acting strange ever since the gathering, both he and Violetfur seem intent on making patrols more intensive and more frequent."

"I saw Shadowstar talking with Riverstar at the gathering," Berryheart spoke up and neither of them looked happy about the conversation. "Do you think it may have something to do with that?" *Was there an issue with AshClan?* Leopardpaw wondered silently, she didn't want to impose on the conversation, she was just an apprentice after all.

"It could, but I can't really remember the last time MoonClan had

any issues with AshClan aside from their usual rudeness." Mosswind pointed out.

"If I'm remembering correctly, the last I remember AshClan and MoonClan fighting was before even Ivystar became leader. This was during Cloudstar's reign, Crowstar hadn't even returned from his journey yet."

"Wow." Berryheart's eyes widened slightly. "Have MoonClan and AshClan been at peace since then?"

"We have never shared a border with them." Mosswind replied. "We've never had a reason to be at odds with AshClan. The only fights in the past were usually the result of Goldenstar who was always ready to fight for no reason."

"You will know what's going on when Shadowstar is ready to tell you." The sudden commanding voice of Violetfur spoke up, all MoonClan cats turned their attention to the deputy. She didn't seem irritated, but Leopardpaw could tell that she was tense, she was worried about something.

"Is there anything you can tell us?" Ashfeather questioned.

Violetfur shook her head. "No, I'm sorry." She waved her tail slowly, continuing forward with the patrol. "It's not because we don't want to, it's because we don't have a lot of information yet. All we know is that Riverstar was acting aggressive towards Shadowstar in particular at the gathering and had some kind of issue to bring up with him, he will discuss it with the rest of the Clan we he knows more."

"Alright." Ashfeather seemed content with Violetfur's answer as did the rest of the patrol. Leopardpaw trusted both her leader and her deputy and knew that they would keep the Clan's best interest at heart, she felt safe.

The night patrol continued, marking the MountainClan border before they began heading home. Leopardpaw thought a lot about the journey that she had made in order to bring MountainClan to the forest. She head learned so much and made a lot of friends, she

was happy that MountainClan was settling in so well in their new home. She often thought about Fennelpaw and especially Owlpaw, she had grown close to the SunClan apprentice during the journey and she was glad that she followed the path of a medicine cat as it clearly suited her more.

Slatepaw, however, had been miserable to be around and Leopardpaw couldn't have been happier to have gotten away from him, but she did miss his mentor, Leafdawn. Despite missing her new friends, Leopardpaw was also very happy to be back in MoonClan with her own Clanmates. She had missed eating fish and swimming with her Clanmates, even if it was too cold to swim.

When the patrol returned to the camp, Violetfur dismissed the warriors and Leopardpaw. "Go ahead and get some sleep." Berryheart mewed to Leopardpaw. "I'll wake you later tomorrow so we can do some hunting along with your brother."

Leopardpaw felt excited at the thought of getting to go hunting. "Thank you, Berryheart." She dipped her head respectfully and padded towards the apprentice den, an old badger den that rested near the warrior's den. She climbed into the den, letting the warmth of the sheltered den and of her fellow apprentices.

In one of the nests was her brother, Ripplepaw. His black pelt almost completely hidden by the shadows of the den. In the other nests were Minnowpaw, Shellpaw and Meadowpaw. They were the oldest apprentices and would've been made warriors already but Leopardpaw learned that Shellpaw had been injured while she was gone and had to have his warrior ceremony postponed and both of his sisters agreed to wait so they could have it together. She knew that they would be made warriors any day now.

Leopardpaw took her nest beside Ripplepaw and curled up and not long after, drifted into a peaceful slumber.

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Leopardpaw opened her eyes, she could hear the low rustling of the wind outside as well as see the sunlight peeking into the apprentice den. She slowly lifted her head and looked around, she was the only

remaining apprentice. Leopardpaw sat up and stretched out, letting out a yawn as she did so. She climbed out of the den to find that it was nearly sunhigh, though it was normal for cats who went on night patrols to sleep in late.

Leopardpaw looked around for her mentor, feeling her stomach growl in the process. She hoped to get some breakfast before they went out hunting. At long last Leopardpaw spotted Berryheart along with Leopardpaw's mother, Peachblossom.

Berryheart was Leopardpaw's aunt along with being her mentor, this wasn't something that was commonly done but Shadowstar wanted Berryheart to have an apprentice since both her and Peachblossom originally started out as rouges.

Leopardpaw had no issue with the fact that her mother used to be a rouge and none of her Clanmates seemed to have any issues with it either. Both her and her brother were treated very well within the Clan and she couldn't be happier. "Good morning, Leopardpaw." Peachblossom called with a pleasant purr.

"Good morning." Leopardpaw waved her tail happily as she trotted over. "Are we getting started soon?" She turned towards Berryheart.

"Yes." Berryheart nodded. "Tallsong and Ripplepaw are currently on a border patrol, but they should be returning soon. Why don't you get yourself something to eat before we leave."

"Alright, thank you." Leopardpaw dipped her head and padded over to the fresh-kill pile. She took a salmon off the top and sat down near the apprentice den to eat. She could sense a bitter chill on the air, leaf-bare was getting closer but she wasn't worried, she had been assured that MoonClan always did the best during leaf-bare and they had the very skilled Oneflight as their medicine cat.

Leopardpaw happily ate her fish and by the time she was finished she heard the sound of the patrolling returning. However, the wind carried an unfamiliar scent which made Leopardpaw tense up slightly as she lifted her head.

Several cats came into view as they entered the hollow where

MoonClan made their camp. At the front of it was the MoonClan patrol, led by Swiftheart with Tallsong, Ripplepaw, Ferretpelt and Swanfeather. Behind them, however, was Riverstar and Stormheart along with several AshClan warriors that Leopardpaw did not recognize.

Leopardpaw spotted Violetfur near the camp entrance, the deputy visibly tensed and walked towards the approaching patrol. "Riverstar." She faced the AshClan leader fearlessly. "What are you doing in our camp."

Riverstar narrowed her sharp blue eyes. "That is something I will discuss with Shadowstar." She glared down at Violetfur. "Last I checked you were not Clan leader." *Why is she being so hostile?* Leopardpaw wondered, feeling her fur stand on end. She could see that her Clanmates were tense and on alert as well.

"If you are in my camp," The stern voice of Shadowstar filled the air as the tom stepped out from his den. "Then you will respect my warriors, Riverstar. Especially my deputy."

Riverstar directed her attention towards Shadowstar. "Perhaps you should instruct your deputy to be more welcoming."

"If you're here to insult me and my Clan then you can just leave, I have no time for your antics."

"We have something to discuss, Shadowstar." Riverstar stepped forward, walking past Violetfur. "And I'm not afraid to say it in front of all of your warriors."

"Then say it." Shadowstar challenged, clearly unphased. *What does she have to say?*

"For the past several gatherings your warriors have been disrespecting mine, I was informed by Harewhisker that it nearly led to a fight at the last gathering so I must ask, do you have a problem with AshClan?" There was a definite challenge in her eyes.

"We have never had an issue with you, Riverstar." Shadowstar replied. "And I spoke to the warrior that nearly started the fight and

he explained to me that it was *Harewhisker* who was the aggressor in that conversation."

"That's not true!" A sharp mew spoke, it belonged to a light brown tom. *Is that Harewhisker?* "Brokenclaw was the one who started the argument."

"As if." Brokenclaw snorted from near the warrior's den. "I wasn't the one who was harassing our apprentices."

"Your apprentices were being loud and disrespectful." Harewhisker argued. "They're almost warriors they should have some sensibility."

"The gathering was *over* mouse-brain." Brokenclaw spat. "Sorry that the elder is getting grumpy over some apprentices having fun." He sneered with a flick of his tail.

"Enough." Riverstar hissed towards Brokenclaw.

"Don't speak to my warriors in that manner, Riverstar." Shadowstar raised his voice. "Not when your warrior was the first one to speak out and clearly the one to instigate a problem at the gathering."

"It's clear that this was caused by *your* apprentices." Riverstar pointed out.

"We were just having fun." Minnowpaw spoke up from beside her siblings. "Meadowpaw bumped into Harewhisker and he nearly bit her head off."

"Perhaps next time you should *stay with your own Clan.*" Harewhisker growled.

"I've heard enough." Shadowstar raised his tail to silence any further conversation. "It was clearly a simple disagreement, Riverstar. There is no need for all this hostility."

"You know very well that this is not the first time this kind of issue has arisen." Riverstar argued. "And it always starts with one of your cats."
"Every cat in this forest knows that you're quick to a fight," Shadowstar stared her down. "But unlike you I can keep my

composure."

"Are you insulting me?" Riverstar growled, Leopardpaw could see her claws flexing. *Surely she won't attack us.* Leopardpaw thought. *She only has four warriors with her.*

"Take that however you want, Riverstar." Shadowstar flicked his tail. "But you and your warriors have overstayed your welcome. Violetfur, Ashfeather, Ebonyclaw, please escort them out of the territory. "I don't want to see you in my camp again."

Riverstar narrowed her eyes as they filled with anger and her body tensed. "Watch yourself and your warriors, Shadowstar. I will not stand for me or my Clanmates to be disrespected to our faces."

"Leave." Shadowstar growled.

Riverstar let out a low huff before she turned, waving her tail and guiding her warriors away. Leopardpaw noticed Harewhisker glaring at Brokenclaw who returned the glare. After a few moments, the AshClan patrol vanished but the tense and hostile air the created remained.

"Should we be worried about that, Shadowstar?" The mew came from Feathercloud. The she-cat had retired, but she lived in the leader's den with Shadowstar as his mate. "Do you think Riverstar will attack."

"There is a chance." Shadowstar replied, making Leopardpaw feel a sense of anxiety. "There is always a chance with Riverstar, but we will not show any fear. MoonClan may be a peaceful Clan but that does not mean why will bow down like cowards. For now we will remain vigilant and at all future gatherings I ask that my warriors keep their distance from AshClan. It's clear that they take anything as a sign of disrespect. We will tread carefully from here on out."

Leopardpaw stared at the remains of her fish. *Everything has been so peaceful within the Clans.* She thought. *Why would Riverstar want to ruin that?*

Chapter 6

Owlpaw padded back into camp with Honeyfrost by her side, the two medicine cats both carrying herbs with them. Honeyfrost had coltsfoot while Honeyfrost carried chickweed, both used to treat coughs. The medicine cats had been hard at work the past few days in an attempt to prepare for the upcoming season, which was approaching fast. Each passing day became colder and colder, the nights were chilly and they would only be getting worse.

Pebblestep had explained that catmint was by for the most important herb during this season, but it was in short supply this season. She had planned to treat each cat as soon as possible with herbs like coltsfoot and chickweed so they could attempt at preventing it the sickness from getting worse.

The two medicine cats reached the den and placed their herbs in the herb store. "Good work." Honeyfrost mewed. "That should be very helpful for us."

"How bad is greencough?" Owlpaw questioned, feeling a small sense of anxiety as she thought about the arrival of leaf-bare.

"It can be bad from what I've heard." Honeyfrost mewed. "The first leaf-bare I experienced was during the journey to the new territories and it claimed the life of a few cats, but none from SunClan." She pawed through the herbs, focused on her task. "Now that I think about I don't think SunClan has lost a cat to greencough in a long time. "Before I was even born, I believe. We've had cats get sick before, but we've usually managed to keep them safe."

Owlpaw let out a breath of relief. "So we should be okay?"

"That depends on us." Honeyfrost turned her attention to Owlpaw. "Cats have been surviving greencough because of the hard work of medicine cats, we will have our work cut out for us. Are you up for it?"

Owlpaw tensed slightly, she wasn't sure exactly how bad it would be, but this was the path she chose. She stepped away from the life of a warrior and she had to find the strength to be a medicine cat, it was her destiny afterall. "I am." She replied, but she couldn't help but feel a slight falter to her voice, she hoped that Honeyfrost didn't notice.

"Good." Honeyfrost waved her tail in satisfaction. "SunClan is lucky to have three medicine cats, we should be just fine this season as long as we're willing to put in the work." Owlpaw nodded and moved to put the rest of her chickweed away. As she did so she stumbled forward, knocking over a pile of dried leaves. Her pelt burned with embarrassment as Honeyfrost looked over at her. "Sorry." She mewed sheepishly. *As long as I don't get under anyone's paws.* Owlpaw thought as she carefully picked up the stack of dried herbs and tucking them away in a safer location. *I should be just fine.*

"When is Pebblestep coming back?" Owlpaw mewed once she finished.

"I'm not sure." Honeyfrost replied. "She went out with Yarrowtail to try and search the entire territory for catmint. She'll probably be gone for a while."

"Alright." Owlpaw wasn't quite sure what to do with herself, Honeyfrost seemed capable of finishing her sorting by herself and Owlpaw didn't want to be in the way. She rose to her paws and left the medicine cat den to give Honeyfrost some space. She sat outside the den and began washing the scent of herbs off her paws. Even though she was happy as a medicine cat there was still a part of her that felt like she was always in the way. SunClan had two fully trained medicine cats, it felt like there wasn't much space for her.

Owlpaw shook her head, trying to get the thoughts out of her head. *It's just nerves. I will find my place. I know I will.* She took a deep breath and tried to clear her thoughts the best she could, but her silence was quickly broken.

"Owlpaw!" The gray she-cat jumped slightly and her eyes shot up, she found Burnclaw racing towards her.

"What's wrong?" She rose to her paws in alarm, feeling a slight sense of panic.

"I think Petalbreeze is about to kit!" He mewed in a panic. Owlpaw's eyes went wide and she felt her body freeze for a moment. *She's kitting? Is this too early?* Owlpaw felt a sharp pit in her stomach. "Owlpaw?" Burnclaw's voice pulled her back and she shook away the panic.

"Right." She took a quick shaky breath. "Let me get, Honeyfrost." She quickly turned on her paws and sped into the medicine cat den. Honeyfrost turned around at Owlpaw's sudden interest, her eyes filling with concern. "Petalbreeze is kitting." Owlpaw explained in a slight panic.

Honeyfrost closed her eyes for a moment and took a deep breath. "Come on, Owlpaw. I need you to gather some herbs while I go check on Petalbreeze. It's time for your first kitting. Grab chervil, ragwort and raspberry leaves." Without wasting another moment, Honeyfrost left the medicine cat den.

Owlpaw felt her paws shaking slightly, she had to move. She forced her body to move towards the herb store. Her eyes scanned over the leaves, petals and berries but they all seemed to blur together. *Chervil...chervil.* She felt her heart pounding within her chest. *Stop.* Owlpaw closed her eyes, taking calmings breaths. *It's okay. You're okay. You know this.* Owlpaw let out her breath and opened her eyes, focusing back on the herbs.

Owlpaw scanned the herbs, feeling slightly more calm as she finally managed to pick out the raspberry, chervil and ragwort. With her herbs safe in her jaws Owlpaw quickly ran to the nursery. As she arrived she noticed Falconheart and Mudfall attempting to wrangle their kits while their mates were inside presumably helping their sister.

Owlpaw slipped by the toms and six kits and stepped into the nursery. The den suddenly felt crowded and overwhelming to Owlpaw, both Sedgefern and Dovepool were sitting by their sister while Burnclaw was sitting behind her, rasping his tongue over her ears. "There you are." Honeyfrost mewed. "Please hurry."

Owlpaw nodded and set down the herbs in front of Honeyfrost. "What do I do?" Owlpaw asked, feeling exasperation.

Honeyfrost placed her paw on Petalbreeze's belly and Owlpaw watched, trying to see exactly what Honeyfrost was doing. She noticed a faint ripple across Petalbreeze's belly and she leaned in closer to see.

"Owlpaw please step back." Honeyfrost spoke, a slight edge to her voice causing Owlpaw to wince and lean back.

"Sorry." She mewed quietly.

"It's fine, and yes it is time for your kits to be born, Petalbreeze." Honeyfrost took a deep breath and let it out slowly before she began working her paws around to help Petalbreeze. Owlpaw felt useless just standing around doing nothing.

Petalbreeze let out a sudden screech of pain which caused Owlpaw to jump, nearly tripping over her own paws. Honeyfrost let out a sigh. "Owlpaw, please. I need you to remain calm we have to help Petalbreeze. Come here please." Owlpaw carefully crossed the nursery to stand beside her mentor.

"Petalbreeze you're going to have to start pushing. It's going to hurt, but bite down on the stick okay?"

"Okay." Petalbreeze whimpered through panicked breaths. Owlpaw could see Petalbreeze's body tense up as she began to push, letting out another cry that was muffled by the sound of her biting down on the stick.

"Just like that, good work." Honeyfrost praised, keep her eyes focused.

Owlpaw shifted her paw to move closer and without realizing she stepped directly on Honeyfrost's tail. Honeyfrost let out a sharp hiss and jumped to her paws, sending the herbs scattering in front of them. "Owlpaw please!" She snapped. Owlpaw's ears flattened, she wasn't sure she had ever heard Honeyfrost yell before. "I need to focus and I can't do that if you're constantly in my way and stepping

on my tail! If you're not going to be helpful then you need leave!"

Owlpaw felt her chest tighten and she turned around, running out of the nursery before she could cause any further issues. "Owlpaw?" She heard a very confused mew from Burnclaw. "Is everything okay with Petalbreeze?"

Owlpaw stopped herself. "Yes, she's fine. Honeyfrost told me to leave so she could take care of it but she's doing good." Owlpaw turned away before the conversation could continue. She finally reached the medicine cat den her paws nearly gave out from sheer guilt. *I'm such a failure as a medicine cat. I thought I could do this. If I can't be a medicine cat then what* can *I do?* Her chest became tight and her breathing was out of her control, each breath was shorter than the last as she gasped for breath, her paws shaking like a leaf in the wind.

Owlpaw forced her eyes shut as she desperately tried to take a full breath. *I failed a warrior, I failed as a medicine cat, what am I supposed to do?* She let her body sit down and she fought against her own breathing continuously for what felt like moons.

"Owlpaw?" A familiar voice spoke, but it was shrouded by the storm of anxiety raging in her head. "Owlpaw." She felt a tail touch her pelt and Owlpaw opened her eyes, it was Rushpaw. She looked towards her brother, focusing on his face to finally get a hold of her breathing. "Are you alright?" Rushpaw questioned, looking incredibly concerned. "I saw you run from the nursery, isn't Petalbreeze giving birth?"

"She is." Owlpaw spoke, her voice faltering. She suddenly felt incredibly exhausted. Her body felt weak and her breath was still shaky. "I just--I kept getting in the way. I had no idea what I was doing and I was only making things harder on Honeyfrost. She told me to leave."

"I'm sorry, Owlpaw." Rushpaw said sympathetically, sitting down beside her. Owlpaw let herself lean into her brother, feeling safer next to him. "Just because you made a few mistakes doesn't mean you're a bad medicine cat. You're an amazing medicine cat, especially after everything you went through on your journey. You

saved a life." Owlpaw briefly thought about Nettleheart, the MountainClan deputy. *I saved her life yes, but where did all those skills go? Why am I struggling now.*

"I'm not a medicine cat so I can't help with that stuff." Rushpaw rested his chin on Owlpaw's head. "But I am your brother, so I can tell you that you are so much stronger than you know. You always have been. You've gone through so much but you always manage to rise above it no matter what."

Owlpaw closed her eyes, she wanted to believe Rushpaw's words, she really did but there was just a part of her that couldn't after what happened in the nursery. She didn't feel like talking about it anymore, and she was sure that Rushpaw could sense that because he also didn't say anything further about the issue.

Rushpaw stayed with Owlpaw in the medicine cat den while Honeyfrost continued to work in the nursery. He got them a squirrel to share, even if Owlpaw didn't have much of an appetite and he kept her distracted by telling stories of his apprentice training. In this moment Owlpaw was incredibly grateful for her brother in this moment. She was lucky to have such loving siblings.

As the sun was starting to set, Owlpaw heard pawsteps and Honeyfrost appeared in the medicine cat den entrance looking exhausted. Owlpaw's entire body tensed and both she and her brother rose to her paws. "Rushpaw, could you please give me and Owlpaw a moment?" Honeyfrost questioned.

"Of course." Rushpaw touched his muzzle to Owlpaw's cheek and mouthed "good luck" before slipping past Honeyfrost and out of the den. Owlpaw felt anxiety burning in her chest again as she faced her mentor.

"Are the kits okay? Is Petalbreeze okay?"

"Yes, they're all okay." Honeyfrost replied. "She gave birth to two kits. A she-cat named Ivykit and a tom named Lightkit."

"Thats good." Owlpaw sighed, looking at her paws. "I'm sorry, Honeyfrost. I-"

"No." Honeyfrost spoke up, Owlpaw turned her gaze back up at her mentor. Her eyes were filled with guilt. "I'm the one who should be sorry. I was impatient with you when I should've taught you the correct way to help a birthing queen and now I've robbed you of that learning opportunity by shoving you out of the den."

Owlpaw shook her head. "When I was on the journey everything seemed to come so easy to me. I felt like I was finally in the right place. I failed as a warrior apprentice and I thought I finally found my way. Then I became a medicine cat apprentice and suddenly I'm struggling so much. I can't remember basic herbs, I'm making a mess and just getting under everyone's paws."

"I'm your mentor, Owlpaw. If you are struggling to learn then it's because *I've* failed you. I suppose I never really struggled that much when I was an apprentice. Everything seemed to come so naturally to me. I never should've assumed that it would be the same for you. I also thought that since you learned so much on your journey that I wouldn't have to train you as much, I see now that I was wrong. You are incredibly smart, Owlpaw. I need to rethink my training methods with you. I learned by studying, but it seems to me that you learn by experience. So let's work together to train you properly, okay?"

Owlpaw felt a weight lift off her shoulders at Honeyfrost's words. "I would like that a lot." Owlpaw said softly. "And you're not a bad mentor, you are the best mentor I could've asked for."

"Thank you," Honeyfrost purred. "But I'll accept that compliment once you earn your full medicine cat name."

"Okay." Owlpaw mewed, feeling more hopeful about her future. *If Honeyfrost and I work together then I truly hope I can be as good a medicine cat as her and Pebblestep.*

Chapter 7

"Good morning, Mountainstar." A friendly voice filled Mountainstar's head and she slowly opened her eyes to see Nettleheart standing in the entrance to her den. Mountainstar let out a heavy yawn as she blinked the sleep out of her eyes.

"Good morning." She purred, feeling happy that Nettleheart's face was the first she saw in the morning.

"It's nearly sunhigh so I wanted to make sure that everything was okay." Nettleheart explained.

"Yeah," Mountainstar sat up, stretching out her limbs as she did so. "I was up late last night with my kits. I haven't got to spend much time with them since they became apprentices." She recalled the night before fondly as she had listened to Wrenpaw, Finchpaw and Sparrowpaw talk about how much they were loving their new lives and telling stories of their training. Mountainstar felt so happy knowing that her kits were thriving in their new home.

"That's adorable." Nettleheart purred. "Well the sunhigh patrol is about to leave, would you like to join me for the hunting patrol?"

"Sure." Mountainstar nodded. "It's been a while since I've been hunting. I feel so busy being a Clan leader and yet I feel like I don't do much at all at the same time."

"You're doing more than you know." Nettleheart mewed, stepping further into the dimly lit den. "You keep us all united, without you none of us would even be here."

Mountainstar felt her heart get warm at Nettleheart's words. "Thank you, and I sure am happy to have everyone here."

"Let's get something to eat before we go out hunting ourselves." Nettleheart suggested and Mountainstar agreed, feeling her stomach growl at them mention of prey. Mountainstar followed her deputy

out into the Clan, jumping down from her den and into the main camp.

She took a look around her camp and noticed that several cats were missing, including the apprentices. Mountainstar assumed that they were on patrol or training. She had to admit she missed spending time with her kits, but she also knew that they were out there living their best lives. They loved being warrior apprentices and Mountainstar loved watching them grow. Even their physical bodies had changed so much. They no longer looked like fluffy kits, they were getting bigger and their pelts were becoming more sleek and their bodies becoming more defined with muscle. Mountainstar felt pride everytime she saw them and was counting down the days when she could make them warriors, though she knew Petalpaw and Mossypaw would be earning their warrior names earlier as they were about two moons older.

However, Mountainstar was equally excited to make the two of them warriors as well, they would be the first warriors to be named in MountainClan and she was incredibly excited. Without thinking much more about it, Mountainstar followed Nettleheart as the two she-cats made their way to the fresh-kill pile. Even though the weather was getting colder, the MountainClan fresh-kill pile was still well stocked. They kept their prey tucked neatly into a crevice in the mountain wall where it was protected from the elements.

Mountainstar grabbed a mouse and Nettleheart grabbed a shrew and the two of them sat near the fresh-kill pile to enjoy their breakfast. "So who else is joining us for this patrol?" She questioned her deputy.

"Gingersky, Poppysong, Flintfoot and Sorrelfern." Nettleheart replied after swallowing a bite of her prey. "It's kind of a big patrol, but I want to make sure that we have enough prey for leaf-bare."

"You're sounding like a natural born Clan cat." Mountainstar purred with amusement.

Nettleheart chuckled. "Well I did this when I was a rouge too. I wandered a lot but during the cold seasons I would find one den to stay in until the weather got warmer and kept a stash of prey as

much I could to avoid going out during the cold. I'm sure you know how rough the leaf-bares where we used to live."

Mountainstar nodded in agreement, leaf-bares had been especially harsh in the mountains where she came from. She recalled the first leaf-bare after her mother died, Tumbleweed had forced her to stay in the den almost the entire season where it was warm while he did his best to keep her entertained.

Mountainstar felt a sense of grief as she remembred both of her parents. She missed Tumbleweed dearly and ever since she learned the truth of StarClan she felt a sense of guilt, she had spent so long thinking her mother was insane. *I'm sorry I didn't believe you...*

"You okay?" Nettleheart's voice pulled her back from her thoughts.

"Yeah, sorry." Mountainstar shook her head, clearing away the guilty thoughts. "Just day dreaming." Nettleheart still looked concerned but she seemed to accept Mountainstar's answer for now.

"Well once we finish here let's head out." Both Nettleheart and Mountainstar finished their prey and discarded the remains. "Let's meet up with the others." Most of the other cats in the patrol with the exception of Poppysong who joined after talking to Fireclaw.

"Are we ready?" Nettleheart questioned and the rest of the cats nodded. Mountainstar followed alongside her Clanmates. Even though Mountainstar was the leader, Nettleheart was in charge of the patrol. She would never try and undermine her deputy, plus Nettleheart was a natural.

They ventured into the forest and Mountainstar breathed in the fresh-air. She loved her new territory, even if they had only lived here a few short moons it already felt like home to her. "Flintfoot and Poppysong, why don't you two go hunting towards the back of the territory where we came from. Gingersky and Sorrelfern, you two go hunting near the MoonClan border and Mountainstar and I will hunt near the LichenClan border."

Mountainstar noted with interest that Nettleheart kept Flintfoot away from the borders. After Timberstar let Mountainstar know

that some of her warriors had been hunting over the LichenClan border, she had addressed her Clanmates and some of them came out including Flintfoot, Fireclaw, Antwhisker and Yewtail.

Mountainstar explained to them that they needed to respect borders more and that they were no longer living alone. She also explained that both LichenClan and MoonClan were allies, not enemies. Mountainstar knew that the Clans could fight, but she intended to keep the peace between her and the other Clans. The last thing she wanted was violence.

Once the group of cats split up, Mountainstar looked at Nettleheart. "Still keeping Flintfoot and the others away from the borders?"

Nettleheart nodded. "At least while hunting." She explained. "I told them they weren't in trouble but that they needed to respect the borders. I caught Antwhisker almost doing it again, I know it's hard for them but they've had time to learn. We can't allow them to get away with this much longer."

"I agree." Mountainstar nodded. "And if it happens again let me know and I will take action."

"Will do." Their conversation came to a close and the two of them ventured out into the forest nearing the LichenClan border. Mountainstar caught the scent of a squirrel and she veered away from Nettleheart as she began to track the prey. She lowered her body to the ground, and moved silently through the brush.

Eventually she spotted the small animal hiding seeds in the ground. *Preparing your own stash for leaf-bare. Unfortunately, it won't matter.* Mountainstar got into position and prepared to pounce. She crept forward slowly until she was close enough and pounced. Her claws connected with the squirrel and she killed it cleanly.

"Great catch." Nettleheart called, Mountainstar looked over her shoulder and purred at the praise.

"Thank you." Mountainstar waved her tail happily.

"Now it's my turn." Nettleheart flicked her ears and Mountainstar

watched as her deputy dropped into a crouch and began tracking her prey. Mountainstar followed silently, and she couldn't help but admire the way that Nettleheart hunted.

She moved confidently, her lean muscles rippling under her pelt with each movement. When she was crouched and hunting the limp in her leg wasn't even noticeable. Her sharp amber eyes were intensely focused and each pawstep was silent and careful. Nettleheart approached her prey, which was a plump mouse, and in the blink of an eye she leapt forward killing the prey.

"Very nice." Mountainstar purred.

"Thanks." Nettleheart held her head proudly. "Let's keep going." She mewed after burying her catch and the two of them continued. They continued their hunt and right as Mountainstar was about to catch another squirrel, she heard a shrill cry of pain. The squirrel vanished into the forest and Mountainstar shot up in alarm.

"Did you hear that?" Nettleheart mewed in a panic, jumping into view. "It sounded like Sorrelfern."

"Let's go find her." The two of them broke into a sprint towards the MoonClan border where Sorrrelfern and Gingersky had been sent to hunt. The two of them ran as fast as they could through the trees, Nettleheart was falling slightly behind Mountainstar due to her limp but Mountainstar couldn't stop for her.

Fear was deep in her heart for her Clanmate and her heart pounded heavily in her chest. As they grew closer to the MoonClan border, the tangy scent of blood filled Mountainstar's nose and she grew even more terrified.

"Gingersky! Sorrelfern!" Mountainstar called out for her Clanmates.

"Over here!" The cry came from Gingersky. "By the river!"

Mountainstar saw the river bank through the trees and she skidded to a stop when she saw the two she-cats. The river border with MoonClan had a steep bank covered in a layer of pebbles. Gingersky was laying over Sorrelfern whose expression was twisted with pain

and her breathing was heavy and frantic. Mountainstar could see blood staining her pelt as well as Gingersky's.

"What happened?" Nettleheart mewed as she approached and both her and Mountainstar carefully jumped down to the river bank. As Mountainstar got closer she could see a large wound going down Sorrelfern's foreleg. It was bleeding steadily, covering her entire leg in blood.

"W-we where hunting." Gingersky spoke, her voice trembling. "And suddenly Sorrelfern slipped, I thought she would be fine since it's not that big of a fall but there was some strange object on the stones that cut her." She motioned with her head towards the object.

Mountainstar turned towards the object, she saw something shiny and jagged laying on the stones, there was one end that was incredibly sharp and now covered in Sorrelfern's blood. "It's probably twoleg rubbish, sometimes they throw it into rivers." She turned back to the injured she-cat. "But we need to focus on getting Sorrelfern back to Mothflower."

"Can you stand?" Nettleheart mewed to Sorrelfern.

"I-I don't think so." Sorrelfern whimpered, her injured leg shaking violently as she tried to walk.

"What's going on?" Mountainstar looked over her shoulder as Flintfoot and Poppysong ran up, panting. "We heard someone cry." His eyes widened as his gaze was directed towards Sorrelfern.

"We need to get her back to camp." Mountainstar spoke. "Immediately." She took a deep breath to gather her thoughts. "Poppysong, run back to camp and tell Mothflower she needs to prepare for an injury. Flintfoot, get down here and help us carry Sorrelfern back to camp. She can't walk." Poppysong turned around and vanished into the trees while Flintfloot leapt down into the river bank. Flintfoot was the largest among them along with Gingersky so the two of them stood side by side as Mountainstar and Nettleheart heaved Sorrelfern carefully onto their shoulders before transferring her to Gingersky and Flintfoot.

"Nettlheart," Mountainstar turned to her deputy. "I need you discard the piece of twoleg rubbish that hurt her. Bury it deep, don't put it back in the river for it to harm another cat."

"Understood." Nettleheart nodded and picked the bloody piece of rubbish carefully in her teeth before hopping off to go bury it.

"Let's go." Mountainstar led her Clanmates back towards their camp, they had to take it slowly which made her nervous. She constantly looked over her shoulder at Sorrelfern, her eyes were closed and her face tightening with pain. Her injured foreleg was covered in blood and the wound was deep, it wasn't bleeding heavily but it was still bleeding. Mountainstar quietly thanked Gingersky for keeping pressure on it.

After a grueling journey back to camp they finally reached it. The climb of the slope was difficult on Gingersky and Flintfoot but they made it. The rest of MountainClan was instantly on alert and rushing to see what was going on.

"Please stay back." Mountainstar raised her voice to keep her Clanmates at bay. "Sorrelfern was injured and we need to get her to Mothflower."

The medicine cat den which rested just below the ledge in front of Mountainstar's den seemed farther away than it ever had been, but they finally reached it. Mountainstar stepped into the den along with the others and found a very panicked looking Mothflower. Her eyes were wide and her body was shaking. *Come on, Mothflower.* Mountainstar thought pitifully. *Sorrelfern needs you.*

"Please put her in this nest." Mothflower mewed, her voice trembling slightly and motioned towards a nest. Mountainstar also noticed Poppysong in the back of the den staying out of the way.

Flintfoot and Gingersky gently put the injured warrior in the nest, Sorrelfern letting out a quiet hiss of pain once her body hit the nest. Mothflower rushed to her side with bundles of cobweb that she used to cover Sorrelfern's wound. Mountainstar could see Mothflower's paws trembling.

"You three should leave." Mountainstar spoke to the warriors in the den. "Mothflower needs space to work, I will update you all soon thank you for your help. If you don't mind please go collect the prey we collected and left behind."

"I can do that, Mountainstar." Poppysong mewed.

"I'll help." Gingersky added and the three of them left, but Flintfoot left without another word. He looked scared and Mountainstar didn't blame him.

"Did you need any help?" Mountainstar asked calmly, trying to help her medicine cat relax.

"I-I-" Mothflower looked around, almost as if she was lost. "Marigold. I need marigold." Mountainstar remembered what marigold looked like from when Owlpaw had used it on both Wrenpaw and Nettleheart. She located the golden flower from Mothflower's disorganized and chaotic herb store and brought it to the medicine cat.

Mothflower peeled away the bloody cobweb and tossed it to the side before chewing the marigold into a poultice and applying it to Sorrelfern's wound. Sorrelfern winced and squeaked in pain but she didn't argue. It seemed as if Mothflower was more relaxed, but her entire body was still tense and fear was written all over her face. Mountainstar couldn't help but think that Owlpaw never looked like this. *This is her first major injury. She can do this.*

Just to be certain, Mountainstar stayed by her side while Mothflower worked. Her paws were crusted with blood and herbs, but Sorrelfern's wound was covered in herbs and once again in a thick layer of cobweb. She let out a sigh. "The bleeding is stopped and it's all wrapped up. Let me get you some poppy seeds for the pain."

"Thank you, Mothflower." Sorrelfern's voice was raw and dry from the amount of pain she had been in.

"Did you need anything else?" Mountainstar questioned.

"No, I think I'm okay from here." Mothflower shook her head slowly. "Thank you for your help, Mountainstar."

"Of course." Mountainstar dipped her head. "Let me know if you need anything else." Mountainstar turned out of the den to a very anxious Clan, they were all visibly worried about their Clanmate.

"Is Sorrelfern okay?" Turnipclaw questioned first.

"I believe she will be. Mothflower got her all wrapped up and treated. She just needs time to rest and heal."

"What happened?" Hazelspring asked.

"There was a piece of twoleg rubbish on the river bank that cut her. Nettleheart is currently getting rid of it."

"Do you think there's anymore?" Mossypaw asked from beside Fireclaw. "I don't wanna get hurt like that." She looked scared.

"I don't think so, but to be certain I will have Nettleheart send out some patrols to check our riverbanks for anything else. I will also tell Mothflower to inform the other medicine cats at the next half-moon so they can check their rivers as well."

Her words seemed to calm her Clanmates, but they all seemed a bit shaken up. They started talking among themselves and Mountainstar spotted Nettleheart standing by the camp entrance. Mountainstar swiftly padded over to her deputy. "Did you get rid of it?"

Nettleheart nodded. "Yes I did. I buried it deep and also wrapped it in oak leaves so it shouldn't be a threat anymore."

"Good." Mountainstar let out an exhausted sigh. "This is the first scary thing our Clan has encountered, I'm glad that Sorrelfern should be okay."

"Me too." Nettleheart mewed. "You did a wonderful job at calming the Clan down. Usually an injury like this would mean death for the former rogue and longers, and for the kittypets they don't have their twolegs to heal them. This is very scary to them, but they will all

grow stronger from this. Sorrelfern included."

"I sure hope so." Mountainstar looked towards the medicine cat den, shrouded by the ledge. One of her main concerns, however, was not Sorrelfern. It was Mothflower. Mothflower had seemed so scared, but Mountainstar tried to give the young medicine cat the benefit of the doubt of it being her first serious injury. She had treated thorns in paws or wrenched claws but even when treating those she had seemed so scared. *I know Mothflower has the potential to be an incredible medicine cat. She just needs to believe in her as the rest of us do.*

Chapter 8

Slatepaw walked into camp, keeping his head low. His mouth was full of prey that he quickly deposited onto the fresh-kill pile. With every movement and action he made he could feel his Clanmates staring at him and judging him. The anger of losing out on his warrior ceremony had not gone away, it had only turned into a smolder instead of a raging fire. He also had barely spoken to his mentor since it happened. She would tell him to hunt, clean the elder's den, clean the nursery or help Blackstorm and Slatepaw did so, in a silent anger. He hadn't forgiven Blackstorm for being the sole cause of the loss of his warrior ceremony. *If he had just left me alone none of this would have ever happened.*

Slatepaw did what Leafdawn asked of him, without complaint, in hopes she would see that he was working hard with his Clanmates, even if he refused to get along with them. He didn't do a whole lot of talking these days, he just wanted to get through the next grueling days, hoping it wouldn't be too much longer before earning his warrior name. His sisters, Mistflight and Dewleaf were living happy lives as warriors and every it made him more and more angry.

"Now that you're done hunting," Leafdawn mewed, causing Slatepaw to turn his attention to her. "Go give Tetra some new moss."

"Okay." Slatepaw replied in a dry tone before heading towards the medicine cat den where Blackstorm kept the extra moss. He stepped inside, breathing a sigh of relief as he found the den empty. He moved to the back of the den and gathered a bunch of moss to bring to the nursery. He left the medicine cat den and crossed the camp quickly to get to the nursery.

Inside Tetra was stretched out across her nest which she had flattened and was clearly clawed up. Her nest was always like this, he didn't know why he just figured it was a rogue thing. "If it isn't the grumpy apprentice." Tetra mewed with a yawn upon seeing

Slatepaw. Slatepaw shot her a glare and lashed his tail but set down the moss bundle and began clearing out the old moss while the queen sat up. "You know if you spend the rest of your days sulking, you're just going to make yourself feel worse."

"Don't talk like you know me." Slatepaw grumbled. "You never had to be an apprentice. You don't want I'm feeling."

"You're right." Tetra mewed, licking her forepaw. "But I know what disappointment feels like, every cat does. I lived on my own for moons, you should consider yourself lucky that you grew up surrounded by cats who love you and are willing to protect you instead of cats that would just as easily toss you to the dogs for an extra bite of crowfood."

"I spent plenty of time around rouges when I was gone." Slatepaw snorted as he finished up clearing out the old moss. "I don't need your life story."

"Good because I wasn't going to give it to you." Tetra said with a smug tone to her voice. "I've seen a lot of arrogant cats in my time, both rogues and now warriors. I seemed to join the Clan that has the *most* arrogant warriors, and yet you somehow top them all."

"If you're trying to get me to open up about how I'm feeling, it's not going to work. I don't care what you or any other cat thinks about me."

"That needs to change." Tetra said, her voice turning slightly dull. Slatepaw turned his head to glare at her once more, she gave him a very serious look.

"It's one thing to not let others bring you down due to insults, but in my short time in this Clan as a warrior I've seen something that really matters. Respect. If your Clanmates don't respect you then what's the point of being a warrior? You'd be better off as a rogue with that attitude."

Better off as a rogue. Slatepaw flicked his tail. "Whatever." He didn't have anything to say in response. He turned away and focused on her nest, thankfully Tetra remained silent for the rest of his work.

Once he finished, Slatepaw stepped to the side.

"Thanks, you grumpy badger." Tetra stepped into her nest and stretched out, immediately making a mess of the nest Slatepaw had worked so hard on. Slatepaw rolled his eyes and left the nursery, leaving Tetra to rest. Once he stepped out into the main camp he looked down at his paws. *If your Clanmates don't respect you then what's the point of being a warrior? You'd be better off as a rogue with that attitude.*

The former rogue's words echoed in his mind, they made him feel unsettled. *She doesn't know what she's talking about.* Slatepaw shook his head and shoved the thoughts to the back of his mind. He couldn't waste his time thinking about stupid nonsense rambled by a pregnant queen.

Slatepaw let out a quiet sigh, he scanned the camp in an attempt to find Leafdawn so he could do something else. He finally spotted her sitting next to her siblings, Dustfall and Rabbitspring. He begrudgingly padded up to her and looked at his mentor. "What am I doing next?"

"Is Tetra's nest done?"

"Yes." Slatepaw replied, flicking his tail.

"Great. We're going to help the other apprentice's train."

Of course. Slatepaw kept a tepid expression and just gave a nod.

"I'll talk to you two later." Leafdawn mewed affectionately towards her siblings. "Come on, they're going to meet us in the forest."

Slatepaw walked out of the camp following his mentor, the silence between them incredibly noticeable. It had been like this ever since Slatepaw lashed out at her and he refused to apologize. He had no reason too because he felt no guilt over what he did or said.

"You've been working hard lately." Leafdawn mewed, without breaking the silence.

If I'm working so hard then why don't you make me a warrior? He

refrained from saying what he wanted to. "Just been doing what you've asked me to."

"Have you thought about what happened? Because I haven't noticed any changes to your attitude toward your Clanmates."

"I'm just trying to become a warrior." Slatepaw grumbled, feeling highly irritated by this conversation.

Leafdawn let out a sigh. "Someday you'll grow up, Slatepaw. Someday." Slatepaw just lowered his head in annoyance as the two of them ventured deeper into the forest. They soon reached the training area where Otterpaw, Russetpaw and Larchpaw were waiting with their respective mentors, Skyfeather, Hailfeather and Sageheart.

"Glad you two could join us." Skyfeather greeted, dipping his head. "We're going to be working on some battle training and we had an odd amount." *Why not put one of them against the medicine cat?* Slatepaw thought bitterly giving Skyfeather a snide look, he knew very well that Skyfeather had stepped down from his position as medicine cat and knew that he could never stand up to the rest of the warriors with how much experience he lost.

"We'll be pairing Russetpaw and Larchpaw together and Otterpaw will be with Slatepaw."

Slatepaw turned to Otterpaw, the brown tom looked scared. "But Slatepaw is mean." Otterpaw said with a flick of his tail. "And he's so much bigger than me."

"Slatepaw won't be saying anything unrelated to the combat." Leafdawn spoke up. "And he won't be attacking you, you will be attack him and he will be dodging." *Great so I'm a training dummy.* Slatepaw thought bitterly.

"Okay." Otterpaw's voice was still uncertain but he faced Slatepaw with his head high. *Since when has AshClan been breeding so many cowards.* He thought about Otterpaw as well as his aunt, Rabbitspring.

"Otterpaw you will be practicing the moves that we worked on this morning." Skyfeather explained. "You may begin."

Russetpaw and Larchpaw stepped off to the side and Otterpaw stepped forward to face Slatepaw. Slatepaw kept his expression stagnant, he would just have to put up with this then he could get away from his Clanmates.

Slatepaw stared down Otterpaw, he could tell the young tom was nervous but his stature, part of Slatepaw wished he could fight back but he would just have to do his best to dodge. Otterpaw ducked down, and was very visibly getting ready to attack. Slatepaw waited and when Otterpaw leapt forward, Slatepaw quickly jumped to the side and Otterpaw hit nothing.

"Try again, Otterpaw." Skyfeather mewed. Otterpaw made another predictable attack that Slatepaw easily dodged. Otterpaw did his best to attack again but Slatepaw continued to side step him. *He's slow. He's clumsy and he's obvious.* Slatepaw glanced over at Skyfeather. *This is what happens when you let medicine cats train warriors.*

Skyfeather padded up to Otterpaw who was getting visibly frustrated. "Take a deep breath, Otterpaw." Skyfeather instructed his apprentice. "You have to understand that Slatepaw already has done all the warrior training, and he's very talented. He's not your siblings, you need to be quieter, more sly and less obvious in your actions. Not only that but you need to be able to predict Slatepaw's movements. If he's going to dodge your attacks every single time, then you need to be able to predict to meet him at the position he's going to dodge. Watch how he moves, he has a pattern. I want you to find it."

I suppose that's not bad advice. Slatepaw thought with a flick of his tail. Skyfeather returned to the other mentors and Otterpaw faced Slatepaw with a newfound determination in his eyes. Slatepaw stood his ground as Otterpaw entered another obvious attack stance. *Has he been paying attention to my dodges? Let's see.*

Otterpaw attacked and Slatepaw dodged the same way that he had before and while Otterpaw attempted to follow up an attack he

dodged again. Otterpaw let out a silent curse and attacked again. This time, instead of jumping to the side, Slatepaw jumped backwards, causing Otterpaw to swipe to the side and lose his balance.

Otterpaw turned and glared at Slatepaw who remained expressionless. Otterpaw attacked again, this time going for a higher swipe towards Slatepaw's face. He ducked his head so Otterpaw swung at the empty air. Otterpaw attempted to bring his paw down on Slatepaw's head but he stepped backwards.

Slatepaw met Otterpaw's gaze, the apprentice was getting more and more frustrated but his attacks were getting better. They weren't all the same, he was trying more and more to match Slatepaw's movements and behavior. Otterpaw attacked again, this time moving a lot faster.

However, Slatepaw still swiftly moved backwards, able to match Otterpaw's increased speed. Otterpaw shot forward again and Slatepaw moved to the cide, circling around the tom. Otterpaw whirled around on his paws and lashed out at Slatepaw who leapt forward, but he felt the apprentice's paw faintly brush the fur on his shoulder.

"You touched me." Slatepaw announced.

Otterpaw's eyes lit up and he attacked again. Slatepaw found himself feeling slightly impressed by how the apprentice was moving. He was getting faster, more precise and less obvious. He still had a lot of improvement to make, but Slatepaw found himself having to try a lot more than the did in the beginning.

The training went on for a bit longer before Skyfeather called it to end. "Good work you three, you as well Slatepaw. You challenged Otterpaw a lot." Slatepaw looked at Otterpaw, he found himself feeling slightly out of breath from having to keep up with the apprentice. Slatepaw gave Otterpw an approving nod.

"We're going to finish up here if you want to take Slatepaw back to camp, Leafdawn." Skyfeather mewed.

"Alright." Leafdawn dipped head. "Come on, Slatepaw." Slatepaw nodded and fell in beside her as they began the walk back to camp.

"You did will helping Otterpaw train. He's been struggling a lot with his fighting but I saw a lot of improvement."

"I didn't do anything." Slatepaw flicked his tail. "All I did was dodge, I didn't even try. Otterpaw was the one adapting his skills. Don't give me credit for something I didn't do."

"Hm," Leafdawn let out a quiet noise. "Still. Thank you for allowing him to do that. I hope you learned something as well."

"Sure." Slatepaw lowered his head slightly. He didn't have anything to say, Otterpaw was the one who learned, not him. *What could I possibly have to learn from an apprentice?* The two of them finally reached camp Leafdawn dismissed Slatepaw and he grabbed prey and went into the apprentice den. He let out a heavy sigh and started eating.

I can get through this. If I keep do what Leafdawn wants eventually she has to make a warrior. She can't put it off forever.

Chapter 9

The cold, bitter air made Owlpaw shivered as she stepped outside. It bit at her lungs and made her let out a cough. *My cough hasn't been an issue as of late.* She thought with slight worry but pressed forward through the camp. Each day was getting colder and colder, she glanced up towards the sky where she saw pale gray clouds. *Snow will be coming soon.* Owlpaw knew this as she had heard both Pebblestep and Honeyfrost talking about it.

She turned her attention to the nursery where she was headed with a jawful of herbs. She poked her head inside and was very pleased with the warm den she stepped into. The nursery was very crowded now, especially since Petalbreeze gave birth to Ivykit and Lightkit.

"Good morning, Owlpaw." Dovepool was the first to greet her and her tiny little kits barreled towards Owlpaw.

"Are those for us?" Squeaked Doekit. "I don't like eating leaves."

Owlpaw let out a quiet purr and set the herbs down. "No, these are for your mother and aunts." She waved her tail.

"Why don't you ever bring things for us?" Mintkit pouted. "I want stuff."

"Well all I have is bitter herbs." Owlpaw laughed softly. "I don't think you want what I have." Mintkit let out a snort, he was clearly not convinced. "If I see your father I'll ask him to bring you something."

That seemed to brighten up their spirits. "What do those herbs do?" Acornkit questioned, his eyes full of curiosity.

"These help queens produce milk to keep you little ones fed." Owlpaw explained.

"What is it called?"

"It's called borage."

"Why do they need it? Can they not make milk on their own?"

"No they can, but this helps them produce more. Especially for Sedgefern and Dovepool who are nearly finishing nursing you."

"What about Petalbreeze?"

"Petalbreeze just had her kits a few days ago so she has plenty of milk, I just want to make sure that she's making enough for Lightkit and Ivykit."

"Why haven't Ivykit and Lightkit done anything? All they do is sleep."

"When kits are just born they need lots of sleep, getting born is just as exhausting for them as it is for the mother."

"When will they start to play?"

"Probably in about a moon, you lot have only recently started playing."

"Why--"

"Acornkit." Dovepool spoke up, looking exhausted. "That's enough, you're going to talk Owlpaw's poor ears off." She sighed. "I'm sorry, Owlpaw. He's just full of questions."

"It's alright." Owlpaw assured them, looking at Acornkit who looked annoyed to be silenced. While Acornkit had been questioning her Owlpaw finished handing out all the herbs. She looked around and couldn't help but notice that Heatherflight and Squirreltail were gone. "Where are the other two?"

"Squirreltail went to get some prey with her family and Heatherflight slept in the warriors den last night." Sedgefern asked, her own kits were napping at her belly. "I think she's struggling to sleep with all the active kits. Juniperkit didn't want to sleep at all."

I wonder if Heatherflight finally feels ready to move back into the

warrior den. Owlpaw wondered. She had given birth to two stillborn kits before Owlpaw was even born but the emotional damage had kept her in the nursery grieving her lost kits. *Maybe she's finally read to return to her warrior duties.*

"Well, I hope she's doing well." Owlpaw mewed. "Did you three need anything else?"

"I don't think so." Petalbreeze replied, looking at her kits lovingly. "Thank you as always, you're doing a wonderful job."

"I'm glad to hear that." Owlpaw felt a purr in her chest. "Let me know if you need anything." Once the queens were taken care of, Owlpaw turned out of the nursery and back into the cold camp. Her body shivered and she padded back into the medicine cat den where Pebblestep was doing some cleaning. "It's so cold out there." She mewed.

"I expect snow within the next few days." Pebblestep replied. "Which means we need to be prepared. We have quite a good supply of herbs, and I managed to get my paws on a solid supply of catmint so I'm not too worried. As long as we keep that nursery free of sickness we shouldn't have any issues. Even our elders seem to be strong enough to fight it off. My only concern would be Sandfoot, she's really showing her age these days."

Owlpaw thought to Sandfoot, she was the oldest cat in the Clan. She spent most of her days resting, especially in leaf-bare she barely left the elder's den due to the cold weather but she still had plenty of life left in her. Though if Sandfoot got greencough, Owlpaw's wasn't so sure she could fight it off.

"Should we give Sandfoot some preventive herbs? Try and build up her strength before the sickness starts to spread."

"Yes, we will do that." Pebblestep gave a small nod. "But don't worry about that right now, I'll take them to her myself in a bit. Why don't you get some prey? You got an early start to your day."

"Okay." Owlpaw dipped her head and stepped back out into the freezing cold camp and headed for the fresh-kill pile.

"Hey, Owlpaw!" Her ears twitched as she heard the voice of Oakpaw. She turned her head and saw all three of her siblings standing together. Oakpaw broke away from the other two and quickly padded up to Owlpaw. "What are you up to?"

"Pebblestep told me I could get some prey." Owlpaw responded.

"Why don't you eat with us?" Oakpaw suggested eagerly. "We all just got back from some early morning training."

"I'd love that." Owlpaw let out a happy purr and she and Oakpaw grabbed two squirrels for the four of them to share. She really missed all the time she got to spend with her siblings since becoming a medicine cat so she was happy to get to share prey with them.

Once they all settled down, protected from the wind by sitting in between the warrior and apprentice dens, they began sharing their prey. "So how is your training going, Owlpaw?" Rushpaw questioned. She had noticed that he had been worried about her ever since the incident with Petalbreeze giving birth.

"It's been better." Owlpaw replied, which was true. Honeyfrost had adjusted her training methods and now Owlpaw felt like she was succeeding a lot more. However, she did partially feel like she was still in the way. She mostly stuck to tasks around the camp like delivering herbs to the queens and elders while Honeyfrost and Pebblestep did the more important stuff. Whenever something came up they would usually send Owlpaw off.

Owlpaw tried her best not to take this personally but it still bothered her. *I know it's just because there's three of us. The medicine cat den is only so big.* Owlpaw brushed the thoughts away and refocused on her siblings. It seemed Oakpaw was telling a story about his last hunting patrol.

"The squirrel was huge and I wasn't worried about catching it, it was so fat there was no way it was faster than me." Oakpaw's eyes lit up as he told his story. "I charged forward and caught it, but it broke out of my claws! I wasn't giving up though, it ran up the tree and I followed it. I grabbed its fluffy tail in my teeth and dragged it

back down. My falling was less than graceful though, my--"

A blood piercing cry filled the air, sending pure fear and shock into Owlpaw's chest. She let out a cry of alarm and jumped up to her paws, her body felt like it was freezing in place. The cry didn't belong to a cat, it belonged to an owl.

"Owlpaw, what's wrong?" The panicked cry of Blossompaw replaced the ringing of the owl's cry in her mind, she shakily looked down at her siblings. They all looked confused and concerned for Owlpaw.

"Y-you didn't hear that?" Her voice trembled as she spoke.

"No?" Oakpaw looked at Blossompaw and Rushpaw, confusion written all over their faces. "What did you hear?"

Owlpaw looked towards the trees, her eyes scanning the barren trees for any sign of the owl. "I-I heard an owl...I know I did."

"Are you sure?" Blossompaw padded forward, touching her tail to Owlpaw's shoulder. "I feel like we would've heard it, especially since it scared you so much."

"I don't know." Owlpaw lowered her voice, now questioning herself. *What did I hear? I know I heard something. It was so loud.* The residual effects of the owl cry left Owlpaw feeling shaky and uncomfortable, she was so confused. She didn't know how that could've happened or what happened at all.

"Are you okay?" Rushpaw asked, his voice quiet and comforting.

"I don't know." Owlpaw sighed. "I don't know what happened, I feel like I'm going crazy."

"Why don't you head back to the medicine cat den?" He suggested. "Maybe Pebblestep and Honeyfrost can help you, but make sure you finish your prey first."

"You're probably right." Owlpaw mewed quietly. She continued eating her prey with her siblings but her mind was in a completely different place. She had no way to explain what had just happened and it was deeply bothering her.

Once Owlpaw finished her prey she bid farewell to her siblings and padded back to the medicine cat den. Both Honeyfrost and Pebblestep were inside and they both looked at her, their expressions instantly shifting to one of concern.

"Are you okay, Owlpaw?" Honeyfrost questioned, padding up to her. "You look like you saw a ghost."

"I was with my siblings when I heard an owl cry, it was so loud and no one else heard it. It was clear as day to me and it made me feel...strange. Uncomfortable and scared."

Honeyfrost and Pebblestep shared a concerned expression. "Are you sure? No one else heard it?" Pebblestep confirmed and Owlpaw nodded. "Owls tend to be signs from StarClan. It was an owl that guided us to the mountains and it was an owl who guided you beyond the mountains to find Mountainstar."

"It was also an owl that StarClan sent to welcome MountainClan into our territories."

"So this was a sign from StarClan?" Owlpaw questioned, finding it hard to believe.

"It's possible." Pebblestep gave a slow nod. "You clearly heard something and no one else did, this could be a message from StarClan but we're not sure yet. The half-moon is coming up soon, perhaps StarClan will have a more clear message for you."

"But why me? Why not one of you two?" Owlpaw asked desperately.

"You have to remember that you guided all of MountainClan to our home, as well was guiding Mountainstar to StarClan as well as the rest of her Clanmates. You have a strong destiny, and perhaps it is time for you to serve StarClan once again."

Owlpaw lowered her head, flattening her ears slightly. *I just wanted to focus on being the best medicine cat I can. Why do I have to get involved with StarClan again?*

Chapter 10

Blossompaw woke with a shiver, as the icy air of leafbare crept into the apprentice den. She slowly lifted her head, eyes opening sluggishly as she let out a big yawn. She was one of two apprentices left in the den, the other one being Rushpaw and without the rest of the apprentices to keep warm with, the den had become brisk. She rose to her paws and stretched out her limbs, shaking her head slightly to wake herself up.

Blossompaw climbed stepped out of the apprentice den and was instantly greeted by a harsh wind to the face. She shivered again and looked around, SunClan camp was barren of any of her Clanmates. She figured that those who weren't out hunting or on patrol were hiding in the warriors den to keep warm. Even if it hadn't snowed yet, Blossompaw knew that it wasn't far off with how harsh the freezing winds were.

Blossompaw knew that Mudfall had planned something for them today, she just wasn't sure what yet. She also knew that if Mudfall wasn't out in the forest, he was probably in the nursery. Blossompaw crossed the camp and arrived at the nursery. The four queens were inside, along with Mudfall who was sharing tongues with Dovepool.

"Good morning, Blossompaw." Dovepool purred, with Mudfall lifting his head as well.

"Blossompaw!" Six little voices cried out in joy as the kits of both Sedgfefern and Dovepool tumbled over themselves to get to her.

"Hey little ones." Blossompaw purred loudly.

"You haven't visited us in in like *forever*." Juniperkit complained, giving Blossompaw an adorable pouty expression.

"I visited you three days ago." Blossompaw let out a laugh.

"It felt like forever." Oatkit pointed out. "We missed you. You're always so busy."

"Well that's what it's like being an apprentice." Blossompaw replied. "But I missed you all too." Due to Mudfall often being in the nursery with Dovepool in between training sessions, Blossompaw was also in here quite a bit and had become quite popular with the kits, telling them stories of her training and playing with them. She loved being around the kits, she felt nothing but happiness watching them play and have fun.

"Are your brothers awake?" Mudfall questioned, pulling Blossompaw's attention away from the kits.

"Oakpaw is, but I didn't see him in camp, Rushpaw was still sleeping when I woke up."

"I imagine Oakpaw and Burnclaw already went out to train." Mudfall touched his muzzle to Dovepool's. "I will come visit you once we're done."

"Are you leaving already?" Mintkit complained, eyes growing sad.

"I'll come visit too. Maybe I'll bring you all something to play with." Blossompaw promised.

That seemed to make the six kits happy enough to let Blossompaw and Mudfall leave the nursery. They stepped out into the cold air and Blossompaw's body shivered. "So what are we doing?"

"You and Oakpaw are going to be helping Maplepaw and Bramblepaw in their warrior assessment."

Blossompaw lifted her head, happily flicking her tail. "That sounds fun."

"Fun, maybe." Mudfall cast her a playful side glance. "But it's also as assessment for you. It may not be your warrior assessment but I need you to take it seriously."

"I always do." Blossompaw said cheekily before the two of them ventured into the forest. As they walked through the trees,

Blossompaw thought about when her own warrior assessment would be. She knew she was still young, but se had been working hard. She recalled when she had been over working herself in a desperate attempt to keep up with her siblings.

She had been doing a lot better thanks to Mudfall, but she still struggled whenever she saw one of her siblings shining above her. She would sometimes push herself a little to hard and strain herself and there was still a deep part of herself that believed she was not as good as her siblings. She did her best to ignore it.

Mudfall led Blossompaw to the training area where Bramblepaw, Maplepaw and Oakpaw were waiting with Larkthorn, Rosewind and Burnclaw. Larkthorn didn't start as Bramblepaw's mentor, but she would be finishing it off since Petalbreeze gave birth to her kits.

"Glad you're finally here." Larkthorn mewed, nodding her head towards Mudfall and Blossompaw. "Are we ready to begin?" She clearly didn't want to waste any time

"Of course." Mudfall nodded. Blossompaw turned her attention. "What is the plan?"

"Blossompaw will be hunting with Bramblepaw and Oakpaw will be hunting with Maplepaw." Rosewind replied. "Maplepaw and Bramblepaw will be taking the charge, they are the ones giving the orders." Eyes seemed to rest on Oakpaw but Blossompaw knew that even though her brother was confident and ambitious, he knew when to listen. Burnclaw also seemed to know this as he didn't seem concerned at all.

"Maplepaw you will be hunting towards the AshClan border and Bramblepaw you will be hunting towards the MoonClan border." Larkthorn added on. "Now go on, it's freezing out here."

The apprentices all nodded and joined up, Blossompaw falling in beside Bramblepaw. She hadn't gotten to spend a lot of time with Bramblepaw during their shared apprenticeship. All she really knew that he spent a lot of time training. His amber eyes fiercely focused on the forest ahead of them. Blossompaw also remained silent as she closely followed him deeper into the forest.

After a short while of walking, Bramblepaw lifted his tail, signaling her to stop. He didn't seem to keen on conversation as he lifted his muzzle into the air, trying to catch a scent. He lowered his body and Blossompaw did the same. He slowly crept forward, his paws barely brushing against the brittle grass on the forest floor. He looked over his shoulder and motioned with his head for Blossompaw to go the side. She gave a tiny nod and went around to the side, her eyes scanned the forest floor when she finally saw what Bramblepaw was hunting.

There was a skinny squirrel near the roots of a tall oak tree, Bramblepaw focused intently on it. Blossompaw knew that if they were spotted that the squirrel would make an easy escape up the tree. Blossompaw silently wished that Bramblepaw would have explained his plan, but she had to work with what she had.

In her own mind she figured that the best way to capture the squirrel would be to come at the squirrel from both sides close to the tree so it was forced to run to either side, but she wasn't sure what Bramblepaw was going to do.

She turned back to where Bramblepaw had been standing and was shocked to see him missing. Her eyes widened slightly and she looked around, trying to see where he had ran off to. *Is he* that *sneaky?*

Finally Blossompaw spotted Bramblepaw's white paws and was shocked to see him climbing up the back of the oak tree where the squirrel stood. *Where'd here learn that?* Mudfall hadn't taught Blossompaw any hunting techniques using trees. She watched with interest as Bramblepaw fixed himself on a low branch, towering over the squirrel and getting ready to charge down the trunk.

Blossompaw suddenly understood just what he had intended to do. He was going to run down the tree and chase the squirrel off and Blossompaw would be the one to catch it. She readied herself to catch the squirrel, her gaze shifting between the squirrel and her Clanmates. After a few moments, Bramblepaw shot down the tree's trunk and the squirrel started to run away.

Blossompaw channeled the energy into her paws and ran towards

the squirrel. She had her sights set on the gray squirrel, her vision tunneled solely onto her prey that she failed to see a root sticking up out of the ground.

Blossompaw's foreleg caught onto the root and she tumbled forward, kicking up a flurry of dead leaves. She landed very awkwardly into her chest and quickly scrambled to her paws only to find that the squirrel was gone. Her entire pelt suddenly felt like it was on fire. *I'm such an idiot!* She scolded herself. *I can't believe I just did that.* She looked over her shoulder sheepishly at Bramblepaw who looked slightly irritated. "I'm sorry."

"It's fine." Bramblepaw's tail twitched. "Let's keep going." He didn't waste anymore time and Blossompaw followed. *I can't believe that happened.* Blossompaw scolded herself, holding her head low in shame. *That was such a dumb mistake. That's something an apprentice fresh out of the nursery would make! Not a nine moon old apprentice!*

However, Blossompaw had to keep going and she had to not let this worsen her skills. She was doing this for Bramblepaw's warrior ceremony, she didn't want to be the reason that Bramblepaw failed this assessment. *Walk it off, Blossompaw.* She told herself, truly wishing that she could.

The two of them continued the search for prey but it seemed to be taking a long time. Colder weather meant less prey, and now Blossompaw was feeling even worse. *What if we don't find anything else?*

At long last, they finally spotted a rather plump mouse. Bramblepaw ducked into a hunting crouch as did Blossompaw, this seemed like an easy hunt for Bramblepaw and he knew this as well so Blossompaw just stayed silent in the back. Bramblepaw leapt forward and caught the mouse cleanly.

"Good catch." Blossompaw mewed quietly.

"Thanks." Bramblepaw replied after burying his catch. He was nearly impossible to read, but Blossompaw followed him as he continued. The hunt continued to be a struggle for the two of them. Bramblepaw caught a squirrel on his own but Blossompaw had

narrowly missed a starling as it flew off.

After they finally managed to catch a mouse together, Mudfall and Larkthorn stepped into view. "The assessment is over." Larkthorn spoke. "Let's meet up with the others." Blossompaw briefly glanced at Bramblepaw and couldn't help but notice a spark of anxiety burning in his amber eyes. *He's worried that I ruined this for him.* Blossompaw thought painfully. She looked up at Mudfall, he wasn't betraying his own emotions and now she had to wait for the results of her own assessment.

After a long and grueling walk, they met up with Oakpaw, Maplepaw and their mentors. "Let's go over Oakpaw and Blossompaw first." Burnclaw mewed. Blossompaw ducked her head. *Of course.* She painfully noticed that at Oakpaw and Maplepaw's feet was much more prey than she and Bramblepaw had caught.

"Oakpaw did very well." Burnclaw began. "He hunted well alongside with Maplepaw and listened to her. They both had clean catches and overall Oakpaw worked well on his own as well."

Oakpaw held his head high, but Blossompaw knew she wouldn't be feeling the same way. Burnclaw stepped back and Mudfall took his place. "Blossompaw had a lot of struggles hunting today, you lost track of your surroundings and fell short of catching a bird. I won't hold the bird too harshly against you as they can be difficult to catch but I could tell that you were too distracted by your own mistakes. I know that you have the potential to do better, Blossompaw. You are a very skilled hunter, you just need to find your place hunting alongside your Clanmates."

Blossompaw ducked her head and stared at her paws, Mudfall words digging into her like thorns. She didn't say anything, she just tried her best to listen and learn from her mentor's words.

Mudfall stepped to the side and Larkthorn stepped up. *Please don't let my screw ups ruin his assessment.* Blossompaw thought anxiously. "Bramblepaw you hunted well, but you need to work on your communication, you needed to communicate with Blossompaw more instead of relying on her to read your mind." *It wasn't his fault.* Blossompaw wanted to say, but she knew better than to speak up.

"However, you do have very refined skilled as a hunter and you have high problem solving skills. You pass, but please consider what I have said."

"Of course." Bramblepaw dipped his head. "Thank you, Larkthorn."

Blossompaw felt a small sense of relief. *At least he will become a warrior.* Next up was Rosewind. "Maplepaw, you took charge well and as Burnclaw said you both did very well on this assessment. Hunting during the cold seasons is exceptionally difficult but you both did well. You pass."

Maplepaw dipped her head respectfully, but Blossompaw could see the excitement burning in her eyes. "Thank you very much, Rosewind."

Rosewind nodded and let out a purr. "Let's go ahead and return to camp so we can have your ceremony."

The group of cats began walking back to the camp, Blossompaw making sure to remain in the back. She noticed Mudfall slowing down to walk beside her. "I know that you were stressed, and I know how hard you can be hard on yourself but you can't let mistakes completely break you down."

"I know." Blossompaw replied quietly. "I just felt so clumsy the entire time, I know I can hunt better than that which is why I feel so frustrated."

"Don't let this ruin you, okay?" Mudfall urged. "You are a great hunter, and I know you will make an incredible warrior but you're too hard on yourself. Allow yourself to make mistakes and learn from them."

Blossompaw just stayed silent, her gaze cast downwards towards the frosted grass beneath her paws. *How can I not be hard on myself? I have to do better. I thought I was getting better but clearly not. If I don't improve my skills then I will be even farther behind my brothers.*

*****

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the

SunStone for a Clan meeting!" Dawnstar's voice billowed throughout the stone hollow, gathering the cats of SunClan to begin the warrior ceremony.

Blossompaw sat near the back of the ground, Rushpaw sat down beside her and Oakpaw beside him. She knew that Oakpaw wanted to ask about her hunting failures but luckily he stayed quiet for now. She also knew that Rushpaw could sense something was wrong with her but she also hoped that he sense she wasn't in a mood to talk about it.

After the Clan seemed to take forever to gather, the ceremony could finally begin. "I have called this meeting because both Bramblepaw and Maplepaw have reached the end of their apprenticeship and it is time for them to take the vow to become warriors." Blossompaw noticed both Maplepaw and Bramblepaw sitting in the center, with their heads held high. "Bramblepaw and Maplepaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend the Clan, even at the cost of your lives?"

"I do." Both siblings replied in turn, their tones steady and confident.

"Then by the powers of StarClan I give you your warrior names. Bramblepaw, from this day forward you will be known as Bramblestrike. SunClan honors your bravery and intelligence." Bramblestrike stepped forward, licking Dawnstar's shoulder while she rested her muzzle on his forehead. "Maplepaw, from this day forward you will be known as Mapleshine. SunClan honors your speed and loyalty." Mapleshine repeated the same ritual. "I am proud to welcome you both as full warriors of SunClan!"

"Bramblestrike! Mapleshine! Bramblestrike! Mapleshine!" The cats of SunClan happily cheered, Blossompaw did as well but there was still a heavy weight on her heart. *I'm happy for them, but I need to focus on improving my skills. I will* not *miss my own warrior ceremony.*

Chapter 11

Mountainstar slowly rose from her nest, stretching out her limbs and letting out a yawn. Her body shivered as the air felt incredibly cold. *My den is too cold for my liking.* She thought, flicking her tail. She considered getting more moss to line her nest, she woke up every day feeling half-frozen. She washed her pelt to warm herself up a bit before stepping out into the camp.

It was early morning in the forest and casting her eyes upwards towards the sky revealed heavy white clouds covered the entire pale sky. *Those are snow clouds. It feels like leaf-bare already but this will be our first snow.* Mountainstar noted. She then carefully hopped down from her den and looked around her camp. Hazelspring was sitting with her two sisters, Riverstep and Briarfall as they shared a hare, huddled close together to keep warm.

She also noticed Gingersky, Antwhisker, Yewtail and Flintfoot all sitting together as well, they were sitting around two piece of prey and talking closely amongst each other. Flintfloot briefly glanced up and gave Mountainstar a weird look, she wasn't sure what the reasoning was behind it. She just have him a respectful nod and turned away, heading towards the medicine cat den.

She was suddenly wondering if there was something out of place on her, she couldn't think of another reason as to why Flintfoot would be looking at her in such a weird manner. She quickly made sure all bits of her fur was smoothed down before she stepped into the medicine cat den. She instantly noticed a slight foul scent in the air, her eyes went to their recently injured warrior, Sorrelfern. The tortoiseshell she-cat was curled up in her nest with her foreleg jutting out. It was wrapped in a thick layer of cobwebs.

Mountainstar looked to Mothflower who had a sense of fear and panic permanently burned into her eyes. Feeling concerned for her medicine cat, Mountainstar approached her. "How is she doing?"

"The wound is infected." Mothflower replied, her voice dry and

shaking. "I can't get it to go away, I don't know what I'm doing." She whimpered. "Maybe this was all a big mistake."

Mountainstar shook her head, stepping forward and resting her tail on Mothflower's shoulders. "I'm sure that all the other medicine cats have struggled with this before." Mothflower just ducked her head, Mountainstar's words clearly weren't helping. "We could always go to MoonClan camp and ask Oneflight for help, or Roseheart in LichenClan."

"I can't leave her." Mothflower shook her head slowly. "I need to make sure nothing gets worse."

"Then I can go." Mountainstar replied. "I'll go to MoonClan camp and see if Oneflight can give some advice and help us out."

"I would appreciate that." Mothflower replied, taking a deep breath and padding over to Sorrelfern to give her wound another look.

"I'll be back as soon as I can." Mountainstar dipped her head then rose to her paws. She stepped out of the den and looked around. She didn't want to go alone, she just had to figure out who she wanted to bring with her. As she scanned her available Clanmates her eyes rested on Flintfoot. *Maybe we've been too restrictive on him and he noticed.* They had been keeping him away from borders, but she should really cut him some slack. "Excuse me, Flintfoot." Mountainstar padded up to the skinny tom.

"What can I do for you?" His voice was flat.

"Sorrelfern's wound is infected and I was going to ask MoonClan's medicine cat for help and I was wondering if you wanted to come with me."

Flintfoot seemed caught off guard, he looked to Antwhisker for a moment before turning back to her. "Sure." He rose to his paws. "Are we going all the way to their camp?"

"Maybe." Mountainstar replied. "If we are, prepared to get your paws wet. MoonClan cats like to swim."

Flintfoot gave her a quizzical look. "Why in the world would they

swim? Especially in this weather."

Mountainstar shrugged. "I have no idea. Hopefully they have ways to cross." She mewed. "I think we should be okay with just the two of us, I don't want this to seem like a threatening patrol."

"Okay." Flintfoot didn't seem to excited, but he also seemed to be suppressing his emotions. Mountainstar wish she knew what was going on inside of his head, but she also didn't want to pressure him to talk.

"Where are you two going?" Mountainstar heard the voice of Nettleheart who seemed to be returning from a patrol.

"Mothflower needs some help with Sorrelfern's infection. Flintfoot and I are going to MoonClan to see if we can get some help from Oneflight."

Nettleheart gave Mountainstar a slightly questioning look, her eyes shifting to Flintfoot for a just a moment as if to say *Him? Really?* Mountainstar just gave her an assuring nod. "Alright, well be safe and stay warm." Nettleheart mewed.

"We will." Mountainstar promised and she led Flintfoot into the forest. They walked side by side for a long while in complete silence which made Mountainstar feel slightly uncomfortable.

They were nearing the river when Flintfoot finally spoke. "So why did you pick me?" He asked, his gaze focused straight ahead of him. "Don't think I haven't noticed you and Nettleheart keeping me away from the borders."

Mountainstar let out a quiet sigh. "I know and I'm sorry, Flintfoot. In my defense you have been frequently crossing them."

"I'm not used to living with borders." Flintfoot replied. "It feels...trapping. I'm not used to hunting in a confined area. When I was a rouge I had the entire world to hunt it with no cats stopping me."

"It's been difficult for all of us." Mountainstar replied. "We all had endless hunting fields and now we don't. I know it can be

frustrating but you're not the only one who has had to sacrifice something. We've all had to. We all agreed to become warriors and we need to work together to work with them properly."

Flintfoot sighed. "I know and I've been trying. I still don't know all the smells other than that MoonClan smells like fish."

"You'll get there." Mountainstar mewed. "And I suppose I haven't been helping by keeping you away from the borders, so I will tell Nettleheart to allow you to go to them again. I just ask that you put the effort in to learn the smells and borders."

Flintfoot hesitated for a moment. "I'll try my best." Mountainstar let out a small breath of a relief. *I was so focused on following the warrior code and appealing to the other leaders that I ignored the needs of my warriors.* Mountainstar silently scolded herself. *I can't let that happen. I need to find the balance.*

The rest of the walk to the river border went on in silence, they eventually reached the slow flowing river and Mountainstar down. "I would avoid crossing if we don't have to." She noted to Flintfoot. "Their sunhigh patrol should be arriving soon though." Flintfoot didn't say anything,

After a short wait, Mountainstar caught the sound of voices and soon a MoonClan patrol showed up. She was still struggling with learning names but she knew at the front of the patrol was the warrior Daisyheart. "Hello, Mountainstar." Daisyheart mewed upon seeing the two of them. "And...?"
"This is my warrior Flintfoot." Mountainstar introduced. *Good to know I'm not the only one struggling with names!*

Daisyheart nodded. "Did you need our help with something?"

"Yes, actually." Mountainstar replied. "One of our warriors was injured a few days ago and she has a pretty nasty infection that Mothflower is struggling to get rid of. We were wondering if Oneflight would be able to give some advice."

Daisyheart looked to her Clanmates, a white she-cat. "What do you think, Icepool?"

Icepool looked at the two MountainClan cats then back to Daisyheart. "I don't see why not. Oneflight already offered his help." Her blue gaze drifted back to Mountainstar and Flintfoot. "Wait here, we'll go get Oneflight. I don't want you crossing the river if you don't have to, it's too cold."

"Thank you very much." Mountainstar dipped her head gratefully.

"Of course." Icepool waved her tail. "We'll be right back." The patrol quickly marked the border then vanished into the trees.

"Hopefully they don't take too long." Flintfoot replied, giving his paws a lick. "I feel like my paws are going to freeze to the ground."

"MoonClan cats are quick remember?" Mountainstar reminded him. "They're usually the fastest in the forest."

Flintfoot shrugged. "All the other Clans are the same to me." Mountainstar held her tongue, she couldn't expect him to know as much about the other Clans as she did. She had listened to Owlpaw's explanations over and over so she would be able to respect the other Clans.

Sure enough not long after, Oneflight came sprinting through the trees. He had clearly been running the entire time but he didn't look out of breath at all. *Impressive.* Mountainstar thought silently. "Hello, Mountainstar." He dipped his head to both of them. "Daisyheart told me you have a warrior with an infected wound?"

"Yes." Mountainstar nodded. "Our warrior Sorrelfern was injured by some kind of twoleg object that had found its way in the riverbed. Mothflower is struggling with getting her infection to go away."

"I'd be happy to help." Oneflight dipped his head. The silver tabby backed up a bit and got a running start. At the edge of the river he leapt across the water and landed gracefully on the other side. "Lead the way." Mountainstar looked at the medicine cat with awe, even Flintfoot seemed impressed. She didn't spend too much time on the feat and with Flintfoot and Oneflight behind her, Mountainstar led the way back to MountainClan camp.

"Are you okay climbing steep inclines?" Mountainstar questioned, remembering the entrance to MountainClan camp wasn't desirable to most cats.

"I can sure try." Oneflight mewed.

"It's not that bad." Flintfoot replied. When they reached the entrance Flintfoot climbed the incline with ease and into the main camp.

"I'll be behind you." Mountainstar told the medicine cat. Oneflight looked at the stone path carefully for a few moments before beginning the climb up the path. He took his time and seemed to be struggling just a bit, but managed to make it to top without slipping.

At the top, Oneflight looked at his paws which seemed to be a bit scraped up. "Sorry about that." Mountainstar mewed, nodding to his paws.

"It's alright." Oneflight gave them a quick lick. "I'll treat them when I get home." Oneflight explained. "Could you lead me to your medicine cat den?"

"Of course." Mountainstar walked across camp, getting a few curious looks from her Clanmates before they reached the opening Mothflower's den. They stepped inside and Oneflight's eyes instantly went to Sorrelfern.

"Oh, you're back." Mothflower's sheepish voice spoke from the shadows of the den and she stepped in. "Hello, Oneflight. Thank you for coming."

"Of course, Mothflower." Oneflight mewed. "I told you I'd always be here to help." He padded over to Sorrelfern who seemed to be in pain. "Come here so I can show you how to fix this."

"Okay." Mothflower's voice was still filled with doubt.

"I'll give you two some space." Mountainstar replied and turned away, leaving the medicine cat den. She let out a sigh once outside, noticing her breath clouding in front of her muzzle.

"Look!" She heard the distant voice of Mossypaw. Mountainstar lifted her head and realized that small flakes were slowly falling from the sky. *The first snow of leaf-bare.* Mountainstar thought, the sight was beautiful but behind filled Mountainstar with concern. *Snow means sickness.* She glanced over her shoulder at the medicine cat den, she heard the stories of how scary greencough could be during leafbare. She felt instant guilt as she doubted Mothflower abilities. *I know she has the skill, but she needs to believe in herself. If she gets so overwhelmed by one injury, what will happen when we have multiple sick cats?*

She let out a low sigh and stared as the slow falling snow. *No matter what happens, I know we'll be okay. I have to believe that.* Her mother's face flashed in her mind. *I have to have faith.*

Chapter 12

"It's snowing!" Blossompaw heard the excited shout of Oatkit. She looked up and sure enough flakes were falling lazily from the sky. *It sure is.* Blossompaw waved her tail and watched the snow fall for a few short moment. "That means prey is going to be even harder to catch." Blossompaw said quietly to herself. Her paws were itching to get out and get hunting, especially now that the snow had begun.

She looked to her mentor who was playing with his kits while they hopped around with their cousins in awe of the falling snow. "Mudfall?" Blossompaw questioned trotting up to him. "Are we able to get some hunting done today?"

"We can do that in a bit." Mudfall replied as Doekit tackled his paws. "If you're bored why don't you take some prey to the elders?"

"Okay." Blossompaw dipped her head . *At least it's something to do.* She thought before rushing to the fresh-kill pile and looking it over. It wasn't as big as it usually was but there was enough for now. *There'd be more if I could go out and get some more.* "They usually like to share prey..." Blossompaw thought, looking over her options. "Crowfur and Rainears both love squirrel, Icepetal and Snowfur love mole and Sandfoot loves birds..." She picked up a decent sized squirrel, vole and the last sparrow for Sandfoot. She carefully carried all the piece of prey to the elder's den.

She stepped inside to find all the elders laying closer together than usual due to the cold weather outside. "There's our favorite apprentice." Sandfoot purred. Blossompaw felt her pelt burn slightly and set the prey down in front of each elder.

"Why do you say that?"

"You always bring us the best prey." Snowtail purred before taking a bite of her mole. "And always on time."

"I just do what Mudfall tells me to do." Blossompaw replied.

"Still," Rainears added. "It means a lot that you take the time to actually consider what we like. You took the time to get to know us." Blossompaw *did* enjoy spending time with the elders and getting to know them. *Does that really make me a good apprentice, though? Or just a considerate Clanmate.*

"Thought it *has* been a while since you've stayed for a story. None of the apprentices want to listen to us anymore." Crowfur teased.

Blossompaw felt a bit of guilt at that comment. She had been focused on her training so much that she hadn't been here as much as she used to. *I suppose if Mudfall is going to be playing with his kits...*"Well I have time now." Blossompaw replied. "Mudfall is with his kits."

"Well if you want a story," Sandfoot purred. "I'd be happy to provide."

"Sure." Blossompaw purred and laid down, tucking her legs under her chest.

"Have you ever heard the story of when every apprentice in SunClan was attacked by Echoheart?" Sandfoot questioned. Blossompaw's eyes went wide and she shook her head. "This was many moons ago, my kits had just recently become warriors and your father and Cinderflame hadn't been apprenticed that long. We later learned that this was a plan by Thornstar. There was a location in our old territory known as Jagged Rocks, it was considered dangerous for apprentices due to a risk of falling, adders in greenleaf and how close it was to the AshClan border. However, Thornstar sent Lionclaw, Adderstrike, Fawnheart, Goldenleaf, Dawnstar, Turtleblaze, Cinderflame and Yarrowtail all to Jagged Rocks to collect herbs for Poppyfur, our medicine cat at the time.

"They were attacked by a group of AshClan cats led by Echoheart and they had to fight alone. They all did a good job at fighting full grown warriors but not without injuries. Right on time, Thornstar showed up and drove them away. I believe it was all a ploy by Thornstar to make him look like a hero. All of the apprentices were okay, obviously, but they were all quite wounded.

"If I remember correctly Yarrowtail was the worst off, and Dawnstar was pretty injured but they all recovered."

"That's insane." Blossompaw replied. "I'm glad that they all got away alright. That could've gone a lot worse."

"I agree." Sandfoot nodded. "It was very scary at the time."

"I remember when that happened." Snowtail mewed. "I was Yarrowtail's mentor and I was so scared for him, but he's always been tougher than he looks. Just like you and your siblings. Always coming back from the brink."

Blossompaw always felt slightly awkward about those comments regarding their birth and how close they had all come to dying. "I suppose." Blossompaw mewed kindly.

"Well thank you for listening to our stories." Sandfoot purred. "We won't keep you from your duties anymore."

"Thank you for the story." Blossompaw dipped her head and she rose to her paws. "I'd be happy to here more."

"We've got plenty." Sandfoot replied. "Maybe next time I'll tell you the story of when my mate was a kit and snuck out in the middle of a blizzard to go find some herbs for his mother."

"That sounds like another scary moment." Blossompaw replied. "But I would love to hear it." She bid farewell to all the elders and stepped back into the camp. The snow was still falling, but at a rather slow pace.

She traveled across camp to Mudfall who was still playing with his kits. "That took a while." Mudfall replied, looking up at his apprentice.

"I stayed for a story."

"Oh nice." Mudfall said approvingly. "I'm sure they enjoyed that."

"Are we able to go hunting?" Blossomapw asked once again after giving him a nod.

Mudfall let out a slight sigh. "Blossompaw I'm worried you're overworking yourself again."

"I'm not." Blossompaw argued. "I've done barely anything today, and I'm resting plenty."

"There are plenty of hunting patrols out there already, we'll go here soon." Blossompaw dropped her shoulders and did her best to hide how disappointed she was, but it was clear that she wasn't doing a good job.

"Alright, alright." Mudfall looked up. "I trust you to go out and hunt a bit on your own if that's what you want. Just be safe and come back before sundown but then you're resting for the rest of the night, do you understand me?"

Blossompaw's head instantly perked up and she raised her tail. "Yes!"

"Off you go then." Mudfall dismissed her and Blossompaw quickly turned and ventured into the forest. She was honestly glad to be hunting on her own as well, she wouldn't feel so pressured and wouldn't be that upset if she made an embarrassing mistake. *Just me on my own time.* She glanced up towards the sky, it was a little bit after sunhigh but she would have plenty of time to hunt.

She starting her personal hunting expedition by trekking towards the AshClan border. She kept her nose sharp, picking between prey scents and the scent of frost and her Clanmates. She managed to pick up the faint scent of squirrel. She lowered her body and took extra caution in her surroundings as she followed the scent trail.

She cause the scent of the AshClan border as she grew closer, but she made sure of where the border was in relation to her. *Where is this squirrel?* She scanned the forest as the ground below her gradually began to turn white from the falling snow. After creeping froward she finally spotted the red squirrel.

She dropped into a hunting crouch and started prowling towards the squirrel. It was completely unaware of her presence. The squirrel turned its head in her direction and instantly ran up the

tree, Blossompaw made a desperate attempt to catch the squirrel but it was already up the tree.

"*That* was pathetic." Blossompaw jumped slightly and turned towards where the new voice came from. It was Slatepaw, watching from his side of the border with a scowl on his face.

"I don't recall asking for your opinion." Blossompaw's fur stood on end. "What are you doing so close to the border? Looking for SunClan cats to insult?"

"I'm hunting, mousebrain." Slatepaw flicked his tail. "I know it may be hard to understand since you clearly don't know how to."

"I know how to hunt!" Blossompaw spat. *Who is he to treat me like a kit?* She flexed her claws into the soil, but she couldn't help but feel ashamed that he had seen her make such a mistake.

"Clearly." Slatepaw snorted. "You need to learn how to hunt in the snow."

"I don't need some AshClan toad telling me how to hunt." Blossompaw growled. "One who can't even earn their warrior name, no less."

"Shut up!" Slatepaw snapped. *Touchy subject.* Blossompaw thought with amusement. "My status as a warrior has nothing to do with my skills. I am the greatest hunter and fighter than AshClan has ever had."

"Clearly." She mocked his earlier tone. "Sounds like it, Slate*paw*."

"Watch your tone." Slatepaw hissed.

"What are you my mentor?" Blossompaw rolled her eyes. "You sure do talk a lot, but I doubt you're better than any other cat in your Clan let alone me."

"I *know* I'm better than you. I'd catch double the amount of prey you could scrape together by hunting like a blind badger."

"I'd *love* to see you try." Blossompaw puffed out her chest.

"And I'd be happy to laugh in your face when I'm proven right." He lashed his tail. "If you really want me to make a fool out of you I'll do it without hesitation." His arrogance was angering Blossompaw to her very core. *I'll prove him wrong.*

"Fine then." She hissed, but thought for just a moment. "Five days from now, we'll meet at the gathering hollow and have a hunting contest. Loser has to admit that they're the worst hunter and the winner gets bragging rights for an entire season."

A fiery passion burned in Slatepaw's eyes. "*You're on."* He mewed boldly and turned away. "I'll see then, and I'll be looking forward to putting you to shame."

"Never gonna happen." Blossompaw declared. Slatepaw gave her one final determined glare he vanished into the pine trees. Blossompaw's anger sudden dropped off and she was suddenly left with a feeling of "What just happened?"

"Did I just challenge Slatepaw?" She questioned. "Can I really beat him? I'm a poor hunter at best and he's had more training than me." She let out a frustrated groan. "Is that even allowed? Us meeting outside the territory? I don't see why not..." She shook her head. "If I'm going to beat him, then I need to practice harder than I've ever practiced." She glanced to the sky, she had wasted a lot of time talking to Slatepaw and she had to at least catch *something.*

You need to learn how to hunt in the snow. His words rang in her mind like an annoying bug. She looked down at her paws and suddenly realized what he meant. Normally her black dappled pelt would blend in with the forest, but now the forest would be turning white and she would stand out.

She remembered Mudfall had mentioned something about snow hunting but they hadn't gotten to that yet. *I can do it.* Blossompaw told herself. *I have to at least try.* She slipped back into the trees and starting searching for more prey. She caught the scent of a mouse and began tracking once again.

This time she was extra careful about her pelt, keeping even lower to the ground than usual. It was awkward, but she managed to

adjust herself to make it comfortable. She spotted the plump mouse digging through the light layer of snow. Blossompaw focused intently on the prey and readied herself to pounce. After inching just a few mousetails foreward, she leapt forward.

Her paws landed cleanly on the mouse and she killed it swiftly. Blossompaw felt of rush of pride and she held her head proudly. *I guess he's not so useless after all.* She glanced in the direction of the AshClan border. *Still. I have a lot to learn if I want to beat him. And I* am *going to beat him. No matter what.*

Chapter 13

Slatepaw stomped away from the border, lashing his tail. The encounter he had with Blossompaw left him with a burning anger in deep in his chest. "The audacity of SunClan cats." Slatepaw huffed. He began tracking down the prey he had caught. *She can barely hunt properly and she has the gall to insult me for not being a warrior? It's not my fault that I'm not a warrior.* He lashed his tail again, he had to make sure his anger subsided before returning to camp or Leafdawn would give him attitude.

He thought more about the contest they planned, he got a sense of satisfaction knowing very well that he would beat her, he would easily beat her in a hunting contest and he would use that to make sure she never forget that he was better, that he was the best apprentice in the entire forest. His whole body buzzed with anticipation at the thought of finally getting to prove his skills. He knew he didn't even need to prepare for this contest, judging from her hunting skills he knew that he would already beat her.

Feeling confident and excited, Slatepaw rounded up the rest of his prey, six pieces which was impressive for the current weather, and returned to the camp. Most of AshClan was either huddling in their dens, hiding from the cold or they were out hunting. Slatepaw silently scoffed. *AshClan warriors shouldn't be afraid of some snow. It's not that cold.* He flicked his tail and tucked his prey neatly into the temporary fresh-kill pile, a crack in the back stone walls of the camp.

As Slatepaw put his prey away, his ears twitched as they heard the voice of Riverstar from within her den. "What should I do about MoonClan?" Slatepaw pretended to keep organizing the fresh-kill pile so he could listen in. He knew that tensions were high in MoonClan and Riverstar had recently visited their camp, but no one would tell Slatepaw any details no matter how much he asked. This would be his chance.

"I'm not sure we should do anything right now, Riverstar." The next

voice belonged to Stormheart. "MoonClan are a peaceful Clan, they won't attack unless we do and I don't think attacking them is the best idea right now. Leaf-bare has just begun, medicine cats will be busy with sickness they don't need to use herbs treating wounds."

Why is this cat deputy again? Slatepaw wondered with a irritated flick of his ear.

"I understand that, Stormheart, but AshClan doesn't stand for disrespect. That's how I was raised to be leader."

"That's how *Goldenstar* was leader. I never knew her but I've heard stories. There is peace during the clans, please consider this."

"I am, Stormheart." Riverstar sighed. "I'm conflicted, I don't want to start and unnecessary fight but it's clear that MoonClan has been acting more hostile lately, I've seen it at every gathering for the past three moons. I tried asking Blackstorm if Oneflight had been acting the same at the half-moons but he didn't seem interested in talking about it." *Useless medicine cats as always.*

"I do agree with that." Stormheart replied. "But I don't think it's worth risking a fight right now. If you wanna make a scene at the next gathering then I won't stop you, but I don't think we should fight right now and see how things develop. If we get the idea that MoonClan is going to attack *us* then we can take a stand, but let's be patient here."

Riverstar let out a sigh. "Alright, Stormheart. I'll hold off for now, thank you. This is why I made you deputy. I miss Ashblaze everyday but I know he would've already been preparing to fight." Slatepaw tensed at the mention of his father. *Ashblaze was a better deputy than Stormheart could ever hope to be.* He thought, feeling anger buzzing in his paws.

"Of course, Riverstar." Stormheart replied. "Ashblaze was a wonderful deputy, but I'm glad I could help." Slatepaw heard the shuffling of paws and he tried to scatter away from the den quick enough but as both of them stepped out, Riverstar spotted him while Stormheart walked away.

After a brief moment, she narrowed her eyes and padded forward. *Oh great, here it comes.* Slatepaw braced himself for another earful, which he would simply just take cause he couldn't afford arguing with the leader. "You didn't happen to hear that conversation, did you Slatepaw?" Her question was more of a challenge than an actual question.

Slatepaw briefly considered his options here, he could lie but judging by Riverstar's tone, she already knew so it would be pointless. "Yeah, I did." Slatepaw answered honestly.

"An honest answer." Riverstar mewed, though she sounded slightly amused.

"I don't lie, Riverstar." Slatepaw narrowed his eyes.

"I suppose not." Riverstar chuckled. "You are a lot of things, Slatepaw, but you've never been a liar. Sometimes a little *too* honest." Slatepaw just snorted. "I suppose I shouldn't be surprised, you are the exact type of cat who would be itching for a fight."

"I don't think we should let MoonClan get away with disrespecting us." Slatepaw stated firmly.

"The old me would've agreed." Riverstar replied. "But being quick to jump into a fight without weighing is what got Ashblaze killed."

Slatepaw flattened his ears. "Ashblaze was killed by SunClan."

"If I would've actually listened to Dawnstar instead of being hostile and we took the time to discuss what happened then there never would've been a fight and Ashblaze would still be here. It was because I was eager to fight that Ashblaze died. Falconheart may have been the one to take your father's life, but I was the one who put in him that position."

Slatepaw stared at the frosty ground. He never really had the chance to spend time with his father before he was killed since he died when Slatepaw was so young, but he did have memories with him. He knew his father was a brave and strong warrior, fierce in battle and loyal to his Clan. *I wanted to be just like him, I still do.*

Slatepaw looked back up at Riverstar. "It doesn't matter anymore." Slatepaw said. "He's dead, has been for a while now." He let out a sigh. "I still think we should attack MoonClan to teach them a lesson."

Riverstar gave a tiny exhausted laugh. "Goldenstar would've loved you."

She keeps bringing up Goldenstar. Slatepaw noted. "Could you tell me more about Goldenstar?"

"You wanna hear about her?" Riverstar gave him a curious look. "Since when are you the one to ask about stories?"

"I don't want stories." Slatepaw flicked his tail. "I just want to know about one of the old leaders."

"Well," Riverstar thought for a moment and her eyes grew distant as she thought about her past. "For pretty much all of my young life I idolized Goldenstar. I wanted to be just like her, I wanted to be leader and I wanted to be as brave as her. My original mentor, Silverstripe, was killed by a fox and afterwards Goldenstar decided to become my mentor. I thought she could do no wrong, I thought she was a perfect leader." She sighed. "But my image of Goldenstar was not the real one, I still believe that she was a great leader, that I will always believe. However, she would attack Clans for no reason.
"She would attack SunClan, MoonClan, LichenClan, all of them without warning and without reason. She wanted AshClan to be the most respected and feared Clan in the forest, knowing that we would fight at any point. We were always prepared." *Sounds like good leadership to me.* Slatepaw thought silently, but didn't interrupt Riverstar. "She didn't care about casualties, on either side. She considered it to be a honor to die for your Clan, even in an unjust battle.

"She also wasn't a good parent, she essentially abandoned her kits and left them for her former mate to care for. Lionstar and his sister Hazelfern were essentially raised by their father and she didn't have any involvement in their lives. She didn't care about kin or blood, and she taught me to do the same." A pained shadow crossed

Riverstar's eyes. "And I'm pretty sure that's what caused my relationship with Echoheart to be destroyed." She shook her head. "But you didn't ask about that." She took a deep breath. "Just know this about Goldenstar, she made a lot of mistakes and she was a violent leader, but she loved her Clan. She was loyal to her very core, just...misguided. That's how I chose to remember her. I am the fourth leader since her reign, both Ivystar and Lionstar did their best to restore AshClan to a well respected Clan, but Echoheart and Thornstar ruined it. All I wanted was to prove AshClan was strong, and while I've made mistakes on the way I'm trying to do to the best for the Clan, and sometimes that means choosing *not* to fight." Riverstar rose to her paws. "I'll stop talking your ears off about the past."

Slatepaw looked up at her, she had certainly said a lot and he wasn't quite sure what to think of it all. "I'm sure you probably agreed with a lot of Goldenstar's practices, knowing you. However I want you to think about this. What kind of legacy do you want to leave in this forest? Cause Goldenstar isn't remembered fondly, she isn't seen as brave or a good leader by the other Clans, even by some AshClan cats. And if you keep following down the path you've chosen, it could have dire consequences on the cats around you. Trust me." She flicked her tail over his ears, causing Slatepaw to duck his head in annoyance. "Just keep working like you have been, you'll be a warrior soon."

Riverstar walked away, waving her tail as she did so. Slatepaw watched her leave, mulling over a lot of the things that she said about both Goldenstar and herself. *What kind of legacy do you want to leave in this forest?* The words echoed in his mind. *Easy question. I want to be the strongest warrior this forest has ever seen.*

Chapter 14

Owlpaw's gaze was directed towards the pale gray sky as snow fell in lazy flurries down towards the ground. The forest floor had become covered in a thin layer of snow and the air had become colder and colder which each passing day. Leaf-bare had finally arrived and with it would come endless troubles including less prey, less herbs and sickness. Honeyfrost and Pebblestep especially had been working hard to be prepared and it almost seemed like there wasn't anything Owlpaw could do to help.

She had found herself once again feeling like she was constantly in the way and getting under their paws. Neither of them had said anything but she couldn't help but notice that all of the difficult and more intensive tasks had been take care of by the older medicine cats whereas Owlpaw was still doing basic tasks like treating elders and checking on the nursery full of kits.

Owlpaw did the work without complaining, she knew that this was a serious time and she still had a lot to learn and she was still an apprentice but Owlpaw couldn't help but feel a deep longing in her chest for something more. She did her best to suppress these feelings but over the last few days it felt like a thorn in her flank.

"Owlpaw!" Honeyfrost's voice suddenly broke in her train of though and Owlpaw whipped around to face her mentor. Honeyfrost was giving her a look of confusion, even though Owlpaw drifting off into thought was nothing new.

"Sorry." Owlpaw dipped her head. "What did you say?" She asked, her belt burning slightly from embarrassment.

"I was going to ask you to go collect some herbs. In all the preparation for leaf-bare there's a few that Pebblestep and I overlooked."

Owlpaw lifted her head, collecting herbs wasn't the hardest task but it would allow her to get at least *something* important done. "Of

course."

"You should take someone with you." Honeyfrost suggestion. "Someone to help you carry them. We need marigold, burdock root and some juniper berries. Anything else you see along the way feel free to grab as well. Thank you, Owlpaw."

"Of course." Owlpaw dipped her head and turned out of the medicine cat den, she didn't want to waste any time. She knew exactly who she wanted to bring with her because they hadn't had any time to spend together. As she stepped into the snowy camp she looked around until she found the mottled black pelt of her sister.

"Blossompaw!" Owlpaw called and she ran over to her littermate who was standing with Mudfall.

"Hi, Owlpaw." Blossompaw's ears perked up and her eyes lit up at the sight of her. "Did you need something?"

Owlpaw briefly looked to Mudfall and hoped she wasn't interrupting anything. "I was actually wondering if you wanted to come gather some herbs with me. Honeyfrost asked me to gather a few things and I could use some help carrying it all back."

Blossompaw looked to her mentor. "Can I go with her? Please?"

"Of course, Blossompaw." Mudfall waved his tail. "You've been training hard lately, something like herb gathering might be just what you need."

His comment made Owlpaw slightly nervous and she turned her gaze to Blossompaw. *Is she over training again?* While Owlpaw had been gone she had heard that Blossompaw had essentially overworked herself to the point of collapse which had her feeling concerned. "Well let's get going before all the herbs freeze!" Blossompaw nudged Owlpaw with her muzzle and the two sisters walked away from Mudfall.

Once they were outside of the main camp, Owlpaw asked the burning question. "You're not overworking yourself again, are you?" She asked quietly.

"No." Blossompaw ducked her head, her ears going back slightly. "I just like training, okay?" Her tone was definitely defensive.

"You know you can talk to me, right, Blossompaw?" Owlpaw assured her. "We're sisters."

"I know." Blossompaw sighed, there was clearly something else going on but Owlpaw didn't know what. "I just--" She stopped for a moment, staring at her paws. "It feels like I'm so far behind our brothers. Rushpaw and Oakpaw don't struggle at all with hunting anymore but I do. I almost ruined Bramblestrike's warrior assessment because of my failures."

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" Owlpaw stepped closer to her sister, wrapping her tail around Blossompaw's shoulders.

"I didn't want anyone to judge me, I don't know if anyone else could understand what I'm going through. You're doing great as a medicine cat and our brothers are already turning into great warriors."

Owlpaw's gaze drifted downwards. "Of course I understand, Blossompaw. I failed at being a warrior, I couldn't hunt, I couldn't fight. That's why I became a medicine cat, but I'm *not* a great medicine cat."

"What do you mean?" Blossompaw raised her head. "You're an amazing medicine cat. You told us all the great stories about healing Berryheart and Leafdawn, and how you saved the MountainClan deputy!"

Owlpaw let out a sigh, she *did* do all those things, but she hadn't done anything nearly as useful since then. "That was outside of the Clan. Since I got back it feels like I'm only in the way. I don't know if it's just because I'm bad at what I do or if the medicine cat den is crowded with three medicine cats." She thought painfully back to the birth of Petalbreeze's kits. *There was only two of us in there.* "But even when Petalbreeze was giving birth, I was nothing but in the way and Honeyfrost had to send me out so she could take care of it herself." Owlpaw slumped her shoulders. "I just feel like a bumbling kit, just like I did when I was a warrior apprentice."

The two sisters were silent for a moment before Blossompaw responded. "I think you're doing a great job, Owlpaw. You will make a great medicine cat and you'll find your paws soon enough."

Owlpaw lifted her head to look at Blossompaw and let out a tiny laugh. "Thank you, but shouldn't you take your own advice?"

Blossompaw let out an awkward chuckle. "I'll try."

Owlpaw touched her muzzle to Blossompaw's cheek. "That's all you have to do, as long as you're trying, then you're doing a great job."

Blossompaw's eyes softened. "Thank you, Owlpaw. I'm so glad that I have you around."

"Of course." Owlpaw waved her tail happily. "We're sisters afterall."

Blossompaw gave a soft purr. "Now we should probably go find those herbs!"

"That's probably a good idea." The two she-cats set out into the first to go searching for the herbs that Honeyfrost requested. The first place they went to was a cluster of juniper bushes near the AshClan border.

Owlpaw began carefully picking the blue-colored berries from the spiky leaves. She glanced briefly over at her sister who seemed to be lost in thought looking over the border. "Everything alright?" Owlpaw called to her.

Blossompaw shook her head. "Yeah, just thinking." She padded over to the juniper bush and started picking the berries as well.

"What are you thinking about?"

She hesitated for a moment, staring intently at the small berries at her paws. "I actually had a question for you. About Slatepaw."

"Slatepaw?" Owlpaw had barely thought about the arrogant AshClan apprentice since the gathering, she had much more pressing issues on her mind. "What about him?"

"Was he as insufferable during your journey as he was at the gathering?"

"Pretty much." Owlpaw sighed as she recalled the constant verbal abuse and insults from Slatepaw. "He never said anything kind to anyone except maybe Leafdawn, and even then he was always testing her and disrespecting her. I've never met a more disrespectful cat. He would help out by hunting and I suppose he fought well when we got attacked, and he saved me but he made sure to insult me as soon as he did so.

"He didn't like Mountainstar when we first met her and wanted me to leave Nettleheart behind to die before insulting rogues. He helped when we were giving battle training to the MountainClan warriors but he was very reluctant and was honestly kind of mean to them so Leafdawn forced him to step away and just made him hunt instead. He was pretty awful."

"Oh my goodness." There seemed to be a horrified look in Blossompaw's eyes. "I didn't realize he was *that* bad, I knew he was arrogant and rude but I didn't think he was so terrible."

"Yeah." Owlpaw sighed again, wrapping her collected berries in an oak leaf. "Why do you wanna know?"

"I encountered him on the border while I was hunting the other day, and as always he insulted me but I was just wondering how bad he actually was." Blossompaw shrugged. "Oh well, he's not our Clanmate, not my problem." Something seemed off about Blossompaw's words, but Owlpaw was sure it was nothing.

"Exactly, he's made it clear he wants nothing to do with me. He's AshClan's problem now."

Blossompaw laughed in agreement and the two of them go to work gathering the rest of the herbs. Owlpaw's thoughts roamed as they did so, she was still curious about why Blossompaw was so curious in Slatepaw, but Blossompaw had always been curious. *I'm sure it's nothing. I'm just glad I got to spend some time with my sister, I know that I will always be able to depend on her.*

Chapter 15

It's almost time. Blossompaw thought as she glanced up towards the setting sun. In just a short amount of time, it would be time for Blossompaw's hunting contest against Slatepaw and she would be sure to defeat him. *I have to.*

She had dedicated most of her time awake to training and refining her hunting skills, she no longer struggled as much hunting in the snow as she had been working hard on how to cloak her dark pelt from the eyes of her prey. She *had* been sacrificing a little bit of sleep in order to keep hunting but no one knew she had been doing so.
She felt more tired than usual, but she was making sure not to overwork herself *too* much as for her mentor and family to notice. She was certain that it would all pay off in the end when she finally put Slatepaw in his place. She had thought about this every single day since she met Slatepaw at the border, and she had never been more determined in her life.

"Blossompaw, stop daydreaming." Blossompaw blinked and remembered that she was still on patrol. Mudfall was looking at her with confusion in his eyes and looking a little annoyed while the rest of the patrol was looking at her with the same look of confusion.

"Sorry." She mewed, her pelt burning as she ran up to catch up with the rest of the patrol. *I need to focus still, I can't let anyone know.* She knew that what she and Slatepaw were doing wasn't technically against the rules, she knew they wouldn't appreciate it. At least she would bring back plenty of prey for the Clan.

She padded alongside the rest of the patrol, making sure that she stayed focused enough to completely the patrol. When it eventually came to an end and they returned to camp, Mudfall turned to Blossompaw. "You were out of it today, is everything okay?"

Blossompaw nodded. "Yep, everything is good."

Mudfall narrowed his eyes. "If you say so. You've been working hard today, I know it's not sundown yet but why don't you take it easy the rest of the night. You looked tired today." *So he has noticed.* Blossompaw thought, flicking her tail. *I'll listen to him though.*

"Okay, Mudfall." She dipped her head. "Thank you." He dipped his head in return and Blossomfall grabbed herself a small mouse from the fresh-kill pile. She knew she had been pushing herself a little too hard, but she was more frustrated with herself for making it so obvious.

She laid down by the apprentice den and began slowly eating her mouse. She took a careful glance around camp, trying to see what the Clan was up to. It wasn't snowing today, but there was a substantial amount of snow on the ground still, even if in the hollow it had mostly been cleared away by the heavy traffic of SunClan.

Her gaze drifted to the nursery where Mudfall had gone. His kits, along with Sedgefern's kits were playing in the snow, kicking up flurries and making tiny snowballs. She gradually turned her attention to the medicine cat den, passing by the elder's den which was wasn't showing much activity as the elders sheltered inside from the cold.

Her attention settled on the medicine cat den, she couldn't see inside so she couldn't see Owlpaw but she did see Pebblestep leaving the medicine cat with a bundle of herbs as she headed towards the elder's den. Blossompaw reflected on the conversation she and Owlpaw had a few days ago, she had been incredibly relieved that Owlpaw understood her struggles. She knew that Owlpaw struggled as a warrior apprentice, but knowing that she wasn't the perfect medicine cat that Blossompaw thought she was gave her a sense of relief. *We really are sisters, and I know I can depend on her.*

She also thought about the part of the conversation that revolved around Slatepaw. Hearing how vile of a cat he actually was just filled Blossompaw with a deeper drive to prove him wrong in their little contest. She flexed her claws, feeling them scrape against the cold stone beneath her paws. *I will win. I have to. I can't let his ego*

grow any bigger.

Blossompaw's ears twitched as she heard the voices of her brothers. Both Rushpaw and Oakpaw seemed to be returning from their training, and she noticed Oakpaw was limping slightly. "Hey! Blossompaw!" Oakpaw happily trotted over to her, he didn't seem to care about his limp. Rushpaw followed closely behind him.

"Are you alright?" Blossompaw questioned. "You're limping."
"I'm alright." Oakpaw sat down, licking his injured paw. "We were doing some battle training and I twisted it while trying to attack Rushpaw."

"He didn't, by the way." Rushpaw said in an amused voice. "I dodged and he slipped on some snow."

Oakpaw didn't seem bothered at all by Rushpaw's words, he looked proud even. "Yeah, but I recovered pretty quickly, and I got that good throw on you."

"You did." Rushpaw chuckled. "He grabbed me by my shoulders and flipped me onto my back." He rolled his shoulders as if they were sore. "You are certainly strong, just a bit...clumsy." Blossompaw purred in amusement, but she couldn't help but feel a twinge of envy. Both her brothers were so skilled, they were excellent fighters and hunters and they seemed to train so well together. Blossompaw knew that the bond between brothers was very strong, just as the bond between sisters was. *But I don't get to train with my sister.*

Blossompaw withheld a sigh and made sure to not express her emotions as her brothers continued telling her about their training session today. "It feels like it's been forever since we've gotten to train with you." Oakpaw mewed and Blossompaw twitched her tail. She had mostly been focusing on he hunting ever since hunting with Bramblestrike and even more so since planning the hunting contest with Slatepaw. *I hope my fighting skills haven't gotten even worse.* She thought with a sense of regret weighing on her shoulders.

"Mudfall has me on a weird training schedule with his kits." Blossompaw said, knowing that it was a lame excuse especially

since Burnclaw, Oakpaw's mentor, also just had kits. Both of them seemed to be doubtful, but they didn't push her any further. "I'll talk to him about us all getting together soon." Blossompaw promised, and she was determined to keep it. *I do miss training with them, even if I know I don't compare.*

"I can't wait." Oakpaw said with a happy wave of his tail and Rushpaw let out a pleased purr. The three siblings sat and talked together for a while until the sun began to set and the snow began to fall.

"Brrr." Rushpaw shivered, flicking his tail. "We should get in the den before the weather gets colder." *Yes. Let's go to sleep.* It would soon be time to meet with Slatepaw and begin the contest. Blossompaw followed her siblings into the den and curled up in her nest. She closed her eyes and slowed her breathing so she would appear sleeping, while making sure she didn't actually fall asleep.

Rushpaw and Oakpaw quietly chatted to each other, much to Blossompaw's annoyance, until they eventually went quiet. She waited for what felt like ever, and was worried she was going to miss the contest and she was sure that Slatepaw would call her out for being late.

When her brothers were finally silent she lifted her head, she heard quiet snoring from Oakpaw while Rushpaw's tail twitched in his sleep. Blossompaw very carefully rose to her paws and crept towards the entrance. She knew both her brothers, especially Oakpaw, were heavy sleepers so she should be okay.

She poked her head out of the den's entrance and looked around. The snow was still slowly falling, but the cats of SunClan were all sleeping in their dens with the exception of Flashtail who sitting watch at the front of camp. Due to the peaceful era the Clans had been living in, only one cat stayed guard throughout the night.

Blossompaw kept her body close to the apprentice den as she slipped out of sigh. She had been planning the best way to sneak out of the hollow the past few days. She made sure to stay silent and out of sight and she ventured towards the medicine cat den. There was a shorter section of the wall. She placed her paws on the

ledge and heaved herself up and over. She turned back to Flashtail who had his back to her. He let out a yawn but Blossompaw was free.

She made sure to remain stealthy as she left the camp and when she was far enough away, broke into a sprint towards the gathering hollow border. The night air was harshly cold, but her run kept her body warm.

After the long run, she finally reached the river and crossed the stepping stones with ease towards the gathering hollow. She kept up the speed until she reached the hollow. She looked around, trying to catch Slatepaw's scent but the air was still and there was no sign of the AshClan apprentice. *Is he not coming? Could he not get out?*

"Took you long enough." An irritated voice spoke and she spotted Slatepaw stepping out from a cluster of brush, he looked annoyed. "I nearly froze to death out here, I was starting to think you were too much a mouseheart to come."

"What? Were you hoping I wouldn't come cause you know what's gonna happen?" Blossompaw sneered.

Slatepaw rolled his eyes and let out a quiet snort. "Yeah, whatever." He lashed his tail. "Quit wasting time because you're scared. Let's start hunting and meet here before sunrise, okay?"

Blossompaw nodded in agreement and without wasting any time, Slatepaw vanished into the trees. Blossompaw took a deep breath and turned in a separate direction, she couldn't waste any time. She lowered her body to the ground and lifted her muzzle, trying to scent the pray. The wind was blowing towards her and she quickly caught the scent of a mouse. *Perfect.* She thought before cautiously creeping forward.

She took extra care to make sure that her pawsteps were silent and that her dark pelt wouldn't give anything away. She moved with easy, her body slipping through the trees with ease. After a long time tracking, she wounded up at the other end of the hollow where she saw the mouse digging at the frozen ground.

She cleared her mind and focused solely on the mouse and extended her claws. She channeled her strength into her hind legs and gave a strong pounce. Her paws landed in the mouse and she killed it quickly and cleanly with her claws. She lifted her head proudly, she was off to a perfect start. *I'm going to win for sure!* She thought proudly and continued her hunt without waiting any time.

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Blossompaw's hunt continued just as successfully, catching four more pieces of prey with just as much ease. She was proud of herself for being so cautious and aware of her surroundings, she hadn't even so much as broken a twig in her hunting session. She felt pride deep in her chest and she glanced towards the sky. It would be sunrise soon and it was a long way home, she figured she should meet back with Slatepaw.

She gathered all five piece of prey and ventured back towards the gathering hollow. She held her head high, knowing that there was no way Slatepaw could have beaten her. She hunted perfectly. She could scent that Slatepaw had already returned and could smell the fresh blood of his prey.

She stepped into the gathering hollow and Slatepaw was sitting patiently in the hollow, her eyes traveled to his paws where she saw a large pile of prey. Her heart suddenly fell to her paws as she counted and realized he had seven piece of prey. *No.* She stopped in her tracks and dropped her prey. *There's no way. I did everything right.*

"Would you look at that." Slatepaw snorted, standing up. "I won. Not surprising anyone." Blossompaw barely heard his words. She just stared at her pile of fresh-kill. *What did I do wrong? I did everything right!* In that moment she felt utterly disappointed in herself. *Why is nothing I do ever good enough?*

"Not gonna say anything?" Slatepaw's sharp voice cut into her thoughts. "Not so full of fire now, are you?"

Blossompaw continued to stare at her prey for a few moments longer before she finally lifted her head. "Congratulations." Was all

she could manage to say, it wasn't even Slatepaw's comments that were hurting her. It was her own failures.

Slatepaw gave her a questioning look. "Congratulations? That's all you have to say? I thought you'd at least have a little more dignity than that. Instead you look like a broken bird."
"What do you want me to say?" Blossompaw replied, her voice getting sharper. "Oh congratulations to the brave and glorious Slatepaw, you have bested me with your superior hunting skills this day? You won, what more do you want from me?" Slatepaw flattened his ears and narrowed his eyes, but Blossompaw didn't care. "I'm going home, enjoy your gloating rights." She began picking up her fresh-kill.

"You know what your problem is?" Slatepaw raised his voice slightly. Blossompaw let out a groan between the mouse between her teeth before setting it down.

"Please, enlighten me."

"You focus too much on your failures." Blossompaw froze slightly, that was not the response she was expecting. "You mess up once and you focus on it over and over, you let it tear you apart and you whine about it a like a kit with a thorn in their paw."

Blossompaw turned around to face him, not realizing he had stepped closer. "We're supposed to learn from our mistakes."

"Yeah, not wallow on them." She winced slightly. "When you mess up there are two things you can do. You can sit and groan and complain and wallow in your own self pity and not improve. *Or* you can move on, take note of what you did wrong and do it again. Quit being such a whiny kit about it."

"I though the great Slatepaw never made mistakes." Blossompaw growled, but felt genuinely confused. *Why is he giving me advice?*

"I do, but I don't let them show because I don't focus on them. It happens and I move on and get better. That's the difference between you and me, you take everything personally. I don't."

Blossompaw didn't have anymore witty responses, and she hated that he had a point. She had spent so much time focusing and beating herself up over her shortcomings that clearly she hadn't improved that much, she was only tearing herself down and not actually improving her skills. Though she would never let Slatepaw know his words resonated with her this much. "Why are you telling me all of this?"

Slatepaw seemed slightly caught off guard by the question but he suddenly seemed annoyed. "Because you just looked so pathetic standing there all sad." He lashed his tail. "Don't forget that I still beat you, the least I could do is give you some advice." He let out a short growl, Blossompaw didn't know why he was so mad at her question. "I'm going home."

Slatepaw quickly collected his prey and vanished into the trees. Blossompaw knew she would have to do the same as well before her Clanmates woke up. She quickly gathered her prey and started running swiftly back to SunClan camp.

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Blossompaw finally returned home and felt exhaustion weighing on her entire body. She sneakily dropped her prey on the fresh-kill pile and went into the apprentice den where she collapsed into her den. She would tell Mudfall the truth tomorrow, that she had been pushing herself too much and she was tired and hopefully he would let her rest a bit. She had also been thinking of Slatepaw's words the entire journey home.

I don't know why he told me all that. Blossompaw thought, as she felt herself quickly drifting off into sleep. *But maybe, just maybe I'll follow his advice.*

Chapter 16

Mountainstar stepped out of her den, the bitter cold stone beneath her paws making her wince. *Leaf-bare seems harsher here than it did in my old home.* Mountainstar thought to herself. *But we were in a sheltered cave.* She had to remind herself. Despite her strong dislike of the cold, she did love her new home.

Mountainstar stretched out to wake herself up then ventured down into the main MountainClan camp. She saw some warriors getting ready for the day, huddling close together or hiding in the warrior's den to keep warm until they were needed. Mountainstar took clear notice of Antwhisker and Riverstep. The two were standing next to each other, their tails intertwined as they huddled close together.

Mountainstar felt warmth in her chest watching them, it was clear that the two of them had becomes mates, and Mountainstar quietly prayed that they would have kits together. She would be so excited to welcome the forest kits born into MountainClan, to her it seemed almost as a blessing from StarClan that her Clan would succeed.

Mountainstar turned her attention away from the two cats and decided to go to the medicine cat den to check on Sorrelfern. It had been several days since Oneflight visited to help Mothflower treat the she-cat's injury and Mountainstar had been making sure to keep an eye on her to make sure everything was going well.

Mountainstar crossed the camp quickly and peered into Mothflower's den. The medicine cat was sitting near the back of her den, and the scent of infection had faded leaving only the scent of herbs. Sorrelfern was sitting up in her nest, giving herself a wash as her injured leg was sticking out.

"Good morning you two." Mountainstar greeted as she stepped inside. Mothflower jumped slightly but turned around, her eyes relaxing.

"Oh, good morning, Mountainstar."

"Good morning." Sorrelfern mewed, she looked a lot better than she had in previous days.

"How is the wound healing up?"

"It's going well, thanks to Oneflight." Mothflower mewed awkwardly. "I've been following his instructions and the wound is healing well."
"I'm really glad to hear that." Mountainstar purred. "Any idea when she will be able to return to her duties? I don't mean to rush, I'm just curious."

A shadow of doubt crossed Mothflower's face. "I'm...not sure." She said, looking at Sorrelfern. "I don't want to put her out too early. Maybe in a few more days?" She was clearly doubting her skills too, she refused to take any credit for healing the injury and would only ever say Oneflight was the one who did it.

Mountainstar withheld a sigh. "Well, I'm glad to hear she's doing better. Keep up the good work, Mothflower." She did her best to build Mothflower's confidence, but it was clear that it had little to no effect on her. Mountainstar slumped her shoulders and turned out of the den, back into the cold morning air. *I just don't know what I can do to help her.* Mountainstar sighed. *She's doing a good job, I just wish she could see it.* Mountainstar shoved the thoughts away, she was just glad that Sorrelfern would be okay, that was the main concern. She felt like she had spent so much time fretting over Mothflower, she needed a break.

She looked across the camp and found Nettleheart organizing patrols. *I need to get out of camp.* Mountainstar trotted over to the deputy. "Good morning, Nettleheart." She instantly felt better as Nettleheart turned her amber gaze onto her.

"Good morning." Nettleheart mewed, waving her tail. "Sleep well?"

"I did." Mountainstar purred, feeling her voice grow soft upon speaking to her deputy. "I was wondering if you could put me on a hunting patrol. I wanna warm myself up."

"Of course." Nettleheart replied, her voice just as soft, almost like

honey to Mountainstar's ears. She noticed the nearby warriors giving them a strange look which caused Mountainstar's pelt to burn slightly. "I've got Dewleaf leading, Sparrowpaw, Flintfoot, and Poppysong a hunt near towards the LichenClan border. You can join them."

"Sounds like a plan." Mountainstar purred, she was happy to be hunting alongside one of her kits so she could see up close how they were improving, but she also felt a slight twinge of doubt as Flintfoot was hunting near the LichenClan border. After their discussion, Mountainstar and Nettleheart had worked together to gradually trust Flintfoot more and hope he wouldn't cross the border, and it seemed like now they were finally letting him hunt near LichenClan's territory. *I have to trust him. He's my Clanmate.*

Mountainstar turned to the cats on her patrol, it was clear that Dewleaf seemed a bit nervous about taking lead on this patrol since she was now on it, he almost seemed to be waiting for her command. "This is your patrol." Mountainstar assured him. "You take the lead, don't mind me."

"Alright." Dewleaf gave a small nod and looked at the patrol. "Let's head out. The sooner we get back the sooner we can warm up." Dewleaf lead the cats out of the camp and Sparrowpaw fell behind, standing next to Mountainstar.

Mountainstar took a good look at her son, noticing how much he had grown. He no longer had his kit fluff, he walked confidently and was starting to get some defined muscles. *He was always the biggest.* She thought fondly, her mind briefly drifting back to when she found Sparrowpaw and his siblings.

They had been so small and helpless, there had even been moments when Mountainstar had worried they wouldn't survive. *And now they are strong and healthy.* She couldn't help but feel a rush of warm pride spreading through her body. She was glad they got to live this life. "How is your training going?" Mountainstar questioned, looking down at the young tom.

"It's going really well." Sparrowpaw replied, waving his tail happily. "I love working with Dewleaf. He's really nice and I like training

with him."

"I'm glad." Mountainstar let out a quiet purr. "You'll be warriors before you know it." Mountainstar had been longing for the day that she would be able to name warriors. She had decided that all their apprentices would becoming warriors on the same day since they all started training at the same time. MountainClan would be without apprentices, but she knew that kits were just over the horizon.

While thinking about the future warrior ceremony, the hunting patrol reached the area they were scheduled to hunt. Dewleaf turned to the patrol, meeting Mountainstar's gaze for a moment before he began. "Me and Sparrowpaw will be hunting towards the gathering hollow. Flintfoot, Poppysong and Mountainstar you can all hunt in the remaining areas near the LichenClan border as well as near the mountains."

The patrol agreed and they all separated. Mountainstar took note that Flintfoot was heading directly towards the LichenClan border. Her tail twitched in anxiety. *Just trust him.* Mountainstar scolded herself. *Trust your warriors.* She shook her head and ventured into the woods. She tried her best to get her mind off Flintfoot and she did for a while as she managed to track down and catch a rabbit.

She buried her catch proudly and continued, though as she grew closer to the LichenClan border she couldn't shake her anxiety. *I can't have Flintfoot breaking the warrior code, it makes the entire Clan look bad.* She forced the thought away once again. She needed to focus on hunting. *Flintfoot is fine. He's fine.* She told herself repeatedly.

She continued her hunt, but her mind was getting harder and harder to control. She tracked down another rabbit, but this one she accidentally alerted by shifting a loose stone with her paw. *Focus!* She yelled at herself and tracked down another piece of prey, a squirrel which she managed to catch. She was very grateful that they still had a decent amount of prey, even with the cold weather and snow.

Her luck seemed to run out as she struggled to find more, but she

did find Flintfoot's scent trail. She tensed a bit, and her anxieties returned. In order to quell her raging thoughts, Mountainstar made the decision to follow his trail. If she found that he didn't cross the border than she could finally put her doubts to rest.

She quickly followed the tom's trail, she picked up the scent of squirrel and found a few small spots of blood on the ground where he killed the squirrel. She continued following him and realized she grew closer and closer towards the LichenClan border. She caught the faint scent of mouse, but figured it must have gotten away from him cause she couldn't find where he caught it.

Mountainstar continued tracking, his scent trail still going strong until she reached the LichenClan border. The scent of LichenClan filled the air, but she could still pick his sent through it. Mountainstar very cautiously placed her paw on the border itself, taking great care not too actually step over the border.

She extended her neck into LichenClan territory and sure enough, Flintfoot's scent was strong on the other side. She also could see through the thick trees, a small are of struggle where Flintfoot had clearly caught some type of prey. She stepped back and let out an annoyed sigh. *He was upset at me for not trusting him, but he's still proving that I can't trust him.* She muttered out a swear under her breath and then turned back to gather her own prey quickly.

She would have to talk to him about this, but she wouldn't do it in front of everyone. She would bring him to her den once they got back so they could have a serious discussion about it. She could no longer let this slide, it would only be so long before LichenClan ran out of patience with her warriors.

Mountainstar had to quickly gather the three pieces of prey she caught before meeting up with the rest of the hunting patrol. She was the last one to arrive and when she did, she noticed Flintfoot was standing with his stolen prey in his mouth casually, not seeming to care or show any guilt or fear about what he did. Mountainstar met his gaze, and his expression didn't shift. *He either doesn't know I know, or he doesn't care.* And Mountainstar wasn't sure which one annoyed her more.

Dewleaf led the patrol back to camp and during the walk, Mountainstar felt anxiety weighing in her stomach like a stone, she didn't want to have this conversation with one of her warriors but she knew she had to do. She needed to prove that her Clan of rouges, loners and kittypets could handle living under the warrior code, and Flintfoot showing no regard for borders or the warrior code reflected poorly on her and her ability to guide and hold her warriors accountable. She had to do this.

The walked to camp seemed to take forever, and Mountainstar made sure to waste no time dropping her prey on the fresh-kill pile and once Flintfoot did the same she turned towards the tom. "Flintfoot, could you please come into my den. I need to talk to you about something."

Flintfoot flicked his ear in annoyance, if he didn't know that she knew now, he certainly did now. "Why?" He responded. *You know why.* Mountainstar thought, feeling annoyance spark in her chest, but she did her best to keep her temper at bay.

"I will explain once we get into my den. This doesn't need to be a public matter." She explained calmly. Flintfloot held her gaze unflinching. She saw from the corner of her eyes that other cats were starting to take notice of the conversation.

"If you have a problem, Mountainstar," Flintfoot stared her down, he knew exactly what he was doing. "Then you can just tell me right here and now. I'm not ashamed of anything I've done."

That comment made the anger in Mountainstar burn hotter, she breathed out through her nose. *Not ashamed? Will I even be able to get home to change?* "Fine. If that's what you want." She raised her head. "You crossed the LichenClan border and stole prey from them. *Again.*"

"I didn't *steal* anything from LichenClan. It started in our territory and I chased it into theirs. It was mine."

"That's not how things work here, Flintfoot." Mountainstar raised her voice. "And you know that. We discussed this when we were forming the Clan."

"It was my prey, just because it crosses some invisible border doesn't mean that it suddenly belongs to LichenClan."

"Yes it does." Mountainstar countered. "That's why we have borders, that's why we have the warrior code."

Flintfoot rolled his eyes the moment she said the words "warrior code". "Please, why should we care about some stupid rules that cats we'll never meet made? When I was a rouge I hunted where I wanted, when I wanted and I was bound by these stupid, nonsensical rules."

"You're *not* a rouge anymore." Mountainstar let out a growl. " You are a warrior, you agreed to defend the warrior code with your life when you became a warrior. Rouges and loners may not have rules to follow and no borders, but you don't have herbs to heal you, you don't have a guaranteed home and you don't have your fellow warriors to support you."

She could tell that Flintfoot was getting increasingly more annoyed, and so was she. It felt like she was talking to a kit. "I was doing just fine on my own before I joined this Clan."
"Then why did you join in the first place?" Mountainstar spat. "You agreed to join us, you agreed to make this journey with us so *why*, why if your life was so perfect did you join us only to break our rules and disrespect me at every single turn?"

"*I'm* disrespecting *you?* You haven't trusted me a single moment since I've been in this Clan."

"And clearly I had good reason." Mountainstar lashed her tail.

"Who even decided that you get to be our leader? Some stupid dead cats? You're just as crazy as the other Clan cats for believing in this stupid StarClan nonsense."

"StarClan is real, I know this because I have seen them myself."

"You're *insane.*" Flintfoot hissed, the way he talked and looked at her filled Mountainstar with even more rage, it was getting harder and harder to hold it back.

"You can't decide what is real and isn't, just like you can't pick and choose what rules to follow. *You* agreed to the warrior code when you joined, you knew what you were getting in to and now you have the audacity to parade around like the rules don't apply to you."

"I regret ever agreeing to those stupid rules!"
"Then leave!" Mountainstar finally reached her breaking point, her anger exploding inside of her like a bolt of lightning. Flintfoot's ears flattened and there was brief shock in eyes his eyes that was quickly replaced by anger.

"Fine." Flintfoot turned away, sprinting out of the camp, vanishing into the forest. Mountainstar's anger vanished in an instant and she was left standing there alone, all MountainClan eyes on her. Her ears dropped slowly as the reality set in. *What did I just do?*

Mountainstar's breath was shaky, her entire body trembled with it. She looked at her Clanmates, they all seemed as shocked as she felt. "I-" She opened her mouth to speak. "I'm sorry that you all had to see that, it was never my intention to send him away I just--" She was struggling to find the right words to say, she didn't feel like a leader right now. She felt like a failure.

"It's okay, Mountainstar." A voice chimed in, it belonged to Poppysong. "Flintfoot was breaking the rules. We all agreed to the warrior code, we knew the drawbacks as well as the benefits. It was clearly not a life he could live. It's not your fault."

Her words seemed to just bounce off Mountainstar, she dipped her head in thanks but she still felt just as guilty. "I need to go to my den to think." It was taking all of her remaining strength and energy not to break down. She turned around and padded to her den, climbing the small path.

Once she got into the den, her legs gave out and she slumped down in her nest. *I failed as a leader.* "I could've helped him...I could've..."

"What?" A different voice spoke, Mountainstar's head snapped around to see Nettleheart standing in the entrance to her den. "You could've changed him?"

"I don't know." Mountainstar said painfully. "I just know I could've done better."

"Flintfoot proved time and time again that we couldn't trust him not to cross the border."

"But then why did he agree to the rules just to break them?" Mountainstar asked, she didn't know if Nettleheart had the answers, she didn't think she did, she just didn't know what else to say.

"I don't know." Nettleheart limped into the den. "Maybe he thought this life would be easy and it became too much for him, maybe he thought the rules wouldn't be so strict. We can't know, only he knows. All I know is that he clearly wasn't meant to live the life of a warrior."

Mountainstar turned away, ducking her head more. "I just feel like I failed him."

"Maybe there was something you could've done, maybe not." Nettleheart sat down beside Mountainstar, their pelts touching. "But I know you did your best. You tried to handle the situation peacefully but he didn't want to. He wanted a fight, maybe he wanted a reason to leave. You can't blame yourself for a single cat's actions."

Mountainstar didn't respond, she just stared at her paws. She recalled the look in Flintfoot's eyes, he seemed shocked that she had told him to leave. She didn't know if that meant he didn't want to, or he just didn't think she had the guts to do it. Either way, Nettleheart's words did make her feel a bit better.

"Thank you, Nettleheart." She mewed quietly.

"Always." Nettleheart leaned in closer, her pelt now pressing against the leader's. Mountainstar lifted her head to look at her deputy. Their muzzles nearly touching as she stared deep into Nettleheart's beautiful amber eyes. Her heart was pounding hard in her chest and suddenly the image of Flintfoot was vanishing from her mind. She felt for a long time that she would never feel this way about another cat, but after what happened she didn't want to ignore her

feelings.

"Can you stay with me tonight?" Mountainstar asked, mustering her remaining courage to ask for the she-cats company throughout the night.

"I thought you would never ask." Nettleheart closed the gap and touched her nose to Mountainstar's. Her body suddenly was burning despite the cold forest outside. She breathed in Nettleheart's sweet, calming and familiar scent. Nettleheart nudged Mountainstar to lay down and she did so.

Nettleheart leaned down, rasping her tongue over Mountainstar's ears. She closed her eyes, she had never felt this kind of companionship before and it seemed to melt all her worries away. In this moment with Nettleheart, all she felt was pure bliss.

Chapter 17

Owlpaw rose from her nest. She could feel the harsh, leaf-bare winds outside, breaking through the entrance of the medicine cat den. Her body shivered and she slowly opened her eyes, blinking the sleep out of her eyes. She lifted her head and yawned as her eyes slowly came into focus. She could see from the den entrance that it was still early morning out, the sky was almost white from the snow-filled clouds as snow fell heavily from the sky.

Owlpaw stretched out her limbs and noticed a faint stinging in her throat. She ignored it, knowing that it was probably from the cold weather. She hadn't been feeling the effects of her lingering sickness for a while, so she wasn't concerned. She looked around the den and noticed that Honeyfrost's nest was empty, and Pebblestep had clearly just woke up as well. The older medicine cat was washing her paws and smoothing down her fur.

"Good morning." Pebblestep greeted once she noticed Owlpaw had woken up.

"Good morning." Owlpaw spoke the words, but they came out weak and incredibly rough. She surprised herself at how bad she sounded. Pebblestep's eyes immediately filled with concern.

"Are you alright?" Pebblestep was on her paws and rushed over to Owlpaw, touching her tail to the apprentice's forehead.

"I'm fine, Pebblestep." Owlpaw assured her after clearing her throat. "The cold weather is just hurting my throat."

Pebblestep took a small step back and met Owlpaw's gaze. "We can't just ignore signs of sickness with you." She explained. "You know exactly what you went through as a kit, just because you are doing better doesn't mean you aren't still at risk of greencough."

Owlpaw knew that arguing with Pebblestep wouldn't get her anywhere so she just sat down and let Pebblestep look her over. "I

haven't been feeling any struggles with my breathing lately." Owlpaw explained.

"That could be because you aren't doing as much physical work. You're not hunting or patrolling anymore."

"No but I still go all over the place gathering herbs." Owlpaw thought about maybe once or twice when she had felt shortness of breath after a particularly long herb gathering session, but they were few and far between.

"You should take some catmint." Pebblestep replied after looking her over.

Owlpaw shook her head. "I don't even have whitecough, there's no need to waste the herb on me. I'll be okay without herbs, I'll just take it easy today."

"At least take some chickweed. We have plenty. Medicine cats need to take herbs too, our Clan is relying on us to stay healthy." Pebblestep assured her. The medicine cat touched her muzzle to Owlpaw's forehead. "I may be the senior medicine cat but I am also your aunt and I promise Yarrowtail I would take care of you."

"I know, Pebblestep." Owlpaw let out a sigh, admitting defeat. "I'll take the herbs, I don't want anyone worrying about me."

"Thank you." Pebblestep purred softly. "I'm going to go check on the elders, Honeyfrost is out collecting herbs. After you take your herbs, head to the nursery and make sure there's no sickness in there. Maybe give the kits some juniper berries to keep their strength up just in case."

"Will do." Owlpaw dipped her head and watched Pebblestep vanish into the falling snow outside. Owlpaw let out a defeated sigh once the medicine cat was gone and turned her attention to the herb store. She looked at the neat pile of chickweed and flicked her tail. She knew that Pebblestep meant well, and that she was just caring for her but Owlpaw felt like she was back in the days where every cat looked at her like she was one strong breeze from falling apart.

She felt a sense of spite rising deep within her chest and grabbed some juniper berries before turning away from the herb store, without taking the chickweed.. She would simply just tell Pebblestep she took a small amount, she wasn't going to waste herbs when she wasn't even sick to begin with.

With the bundle of juniper berries secured, Owlpaw stepped out into the falling snow. The SunClan camp was nearly empty, with only paw prints in the snow showing that there had been life within the camp. She knew most of her Clanmates were taking shelter in the den from the harsh cold weather outside.

As she breathed in the cold air, she felt the sting return to her throat but she knew this was normal for the freezing season. She hurried to the nursery to prevent the sensation from getting worse. She stepped into the nursery and saw the residents inside, along with Blossompaw to her surprise.

She was laying down with Oatkit, Juniperkit, Thistlekit, Doekit, Mintkit and Acornkit jumping all over her and playing. Sedgefern and Dovepool were near Petalbreeze who had Ivykit and Lightkit sleeping peacefully against her belly, keeping warm. Blossompaw looked up and her eyes lit up when she saw Owlpaw.

"Hey there!" Blossompaw greeted happily. Upon her noticing Owlpaw, the kits did too. All six kits scrambled to their paws and clumsily ran towards Owlpaw.

"Hi, Owlpaw!" Thistlekit greeted happily. "What are those?"

"These are juniper berries." Owlpaw mewed, setting down her berries. "They're going to help you all keep strong and healthy." The kits gave the berries a curious sniff. "But I also wanted to check if there were any signs of sickness within the nursery?" She questioned, looking to the three queens off to the side.

It was Sedgefern who answered. "Not that I am aware of." She replied. "No one's been coughing, a few sneezes here and there but that's about it."

"Well let me know if anyone start's coughing or anything, even the

smallest thing. We want to take care of it right away before it possibly becomes worse." *Hypocrite.*

"Of course, Owlpaw." Petalbreeze purred. "We promise we'll let you or the other two medicine cats know right away."

"Thank you." Owlpaw looked down at the six kits who were still looking curiously at the berries. Oatkit was gently nudging one with his paws. "You need to take these, they will keep you strong."

Thistlekit listened right away, eating one of the berries. He instantly made a face and shook his head. "That's yucky!" The other kits instantly shied away from the berries and seemed uncertain.

"I know they don't taste great but you need to eat them." Owlpaw urged them. "They'll keep you nice and healthy."

The kits all exchanged an uncertain glance before they all took a step back from the berries. Owlpaw was never good at convincing kits to take herbs, that job usually went to Honeyfrost or Pebblestep.

"Come on you lot." Blossompaw rose up, looking down at the kits. "The first kit to finish their berry gets the first badger ride!"

Instantly all five sets of eyes lit up and they scrambled to eat their berries. "I'm done!" Mintkit announced, holding his head high.

"No I finished first!" Oatkit argued.

"No I did!" Doekit chimed in. Owlpaw was genuinely impressed, they had eaten them in the blink of an eye. *And Blossompaw isn't even a medicine cat, maybe she's just good with kits.*

"How about..." Blossompaw gave them a coy look. "You all get on!" She announced and ducked down, allowing all six kits to climb on her shoulders and back. She was clearly struggling against all of their weigh but she kept them steady as she carried them on her back.

"I will leave you to have fun." Owlpaw dipped her head and turned out of the nursery, back into the harsh cold. She took a few steps

before a few coughs escaped her throat. Her chest burned slightly after she finished. She looked around cautiously, the camp was still empty, she just hoped that Blossompaw didn't hear from inside the nursery. *I'm fine.* Owlpaw told herself, she would take herbs if she felt any worse.

Owlpaw padded back to the medicine cat den, Pebblestep was still in the elders den but Honeyfrost had returned. She was setting herbs in their herb store, and Owlpaw noticed she was adding chickweed. *At least now Pebblestep won't notice that I didn't take the chickweed.* "Welcome back." Owlpaw replied, clearing her throat as she did.

"Thank you." Honeyfrost waved her tail slightly. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah," Owlpaw nodded. "Just a bit of a sore throat, I already took some chickweed."

"That's good." Honeyfrost mewed softly. "You should take it easy today, though. Don't want the sore throat turning into something more."

"Will do." Owlpaw dipped her head and returned to her nest, washing her pelt to try and warm up. *I hate not being busy, but if it gets them off my case, I'll rest.*

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Owlpaw spent a good portion of the day resting, but she hated not doing anything. She wanted to keep her paws busy, she felt useless and she couldn't help but feel like Pebblestep and Honeyfrost were treating her like a kit again.

But resting didn't make her feel any better, her breathing was starting to become labored, her throat was still store and her head felt heavy. *Maybe I should take the herbs.* She thought, twitching her tail.

She suddenly heard pawsteps and Blososmpaw's head poked into the den. "Hi, Owlpaw!"

Owlpaw cleared her throat and lifted her head. "Hi, Blossompaw."

"Come share fresh-kill with me. Rushpaw and Oakpaw are busy and I don't wanna eat alone."

"Sure." Owlpaw stood up, she hadn't had much of an appetite throughout the day so she hoped maybe eating something would help her feel better. She walked towards the entrance, stumbling slightly as she did so, but managing to recover.

"You alright?" Blossompaw tilted her head.

"Yep." Owlpaw said. "I've always been a bit clumsy." She reminded her sister and pushed forward. Blossompaw seemed slightly unsure but waved her tail and Owlpaw followed her to the fresh-kill pile. The harsh cold weather only made her throat feel worse, but she kept it down.

Blossompaw picked up a squirrel. "Come on, we can eat in the apprentice den so we don't freeze our tails off." Owlpaw just quietly followed her sister. The walk to the apprentice den seemed to take so long. *Was the camp always this big?*

She looked down at her paws, and they began blurring into the snow beneath them. She looked up at Blossompaw, her multi-colored coat was beginning to blur into one, shapeless color. *Help.* She tried to find her voice and call to Blossompaw. Her mind was spinning, the world was slowly vanishing around her.

She tried to take a deep breath, but her lungs failed her. *I can't breathe.* She took one final step forward but it never found the ground. Owlpaw felt her body become as heavy as stone before falling towards the stone hollow, falling into pure darkness.

Chapter 18

"*I was so close to* letting it get away, but then I caught it at the last moment." Blossompaw spoke proudly while Owlpaw walked behind her. "Even I was pretty impressed with myself I--" She was cut off by the sound of a thud behind her. She whipped around and suddenly her blood went as cold as the air around them.

Owlpaw had collapsed, she was still as a stone in the snow behind her. "Owlpaw?" Blossompaw quickly ran to her sister's side, she was twitching slightly and her breathing was incredibly. "Owlpaw!" She cried out, feeling panic rush into her chest. "Owlpaw!" She looked around in a panic, cats had heard her cries and were emerging from their dens looking concerned. "Pebblestep! Honeyfrost!" Blossompaw wailed for the medicine cats. "Help!"

Pebblestep suddenly emerged at the elder's den entrance and her eyes went wide. She quickly bounded across the camp in seconds and skidded to a stop near Owlpaw. "What happened?" Pebblestep demanded.

Blossompaw found it hard to speak as her body started shaking from the fear of watching her sister lay lifeless on the ground. "I-I I don't know--she--she just fell."

Pebblestep touched her muzzle to Owlpaw's forehead and let out a panicked breath. "She has a fever and she's not breathing very well."

"What's happening?" Blossompaw heard the frantic voice of their mother. Briarrose sprinted up to Pebblestep and Owlpaw, her eyes horrified. "Is she okay?"

"Get back." Pebblestep commanded. "She could have greencough and I don't need you getting it either."

"I don't care!" Briarrose wailed, forcing herself closer to Owlpaw.

"Yarrowtail!" Pebblestep snapped and Blossompaw just noticed that

her father had been running up as well. "Please control your mate."

Yarrowtail nodded and wrapped his fluffy tail around Briarrose's shoulder and pulled her back. "Give her space, you won't help by getting in the way." Blossompaw was completely shocked at how calm her father seemed, but upon looking closer she could the storm of fear and anxiety raging in his green eyes. Briarrose sobbed and pushed her muzzle into Yarrowtail's chest.

"What's going on?" Another voice joined the fray and Blossompaw spotted both Oakpaw and Rushpaw returning from their hunting patrol. They dropped their prey and rushed over to the rest of the family, both looking petrified at the sight of Owlpaw.

"What happened to her?" Oakpaw demanded, rushing over to her just as Briarrose had done but Rushpaw jumped in the way.

"Don't." Rushpaw urged, his voice shaking from fear. "Pebblestep is the medicine cat, she will take care of her."

Oakpaw look frustrated but listened, his claws scraping against the stone hollow. Blossompaw looked at Pebblestep who was hoisting Owlpaw onto her back. Rushpaw only stepped forward to make sure she was stable, but Blossompaw noticed in this moment just how tiny Owlpaw actually was.

"When Honeyfrost gets back, send her directly to the den. No visitors until I know what I'm dealing with. Last thing we need is greencough spreading around the camp and into our nursery full of kits."

Owlpaw's family watched helplessly as Pebblestep carefully carried her into the medicine cat den. Blossompaw stared at the entrance to the den even after Pebblestep and Owlpaw had vanished inside, she couldn't even feel the cold under her paws or biting at her pelt anymore. The only sensation she felt was the suffocating and crippling fear that filled her body. *Please.* She pleaded silently. *You can't take Owlpaw from me. I need her. We all need her.*

"What happened?" The low voice of Yarrowtail filled her mind and she slowly looked over to her father.

Blossompaw cleared her throat and attempted to explain a bit more in detail what happened. "I don't really know...I asked her to get some prey with me and I noticed she was a bit clumsier than usual but she promised she was fine. Then I was walking and she just collapsed behind me."

Yarrowtail thought for a long few moments, his face was clearly troubled and he was just as scared at the rest of the family but he was keeping it together a lot better than Briarrose and Blossompaw. "I know it's scary." He finally spoke after taking deep breath. "But she is in the paws of both Pebblestep and Honeyfrost, she's stronger than she looks we have to remember that. She will be okay."

Blossompaw desperately clung onto her father's words, she had to believe them. She had to believe that Owlpaw would be okay. "Come here you three." Yarrowtail motioned to his children. Blossompaw looked to her brothers, Rushpaw was silently panicking and Oakpaw had replaced his own emotions for being stoic and trying to look strong but after a moment they all walked over to their parents and huddled close together.

Being surrounded by her parents and siblings made Blossompaw feel safer, she felt warm and she felt comforted. *But Owlpaw is missing.* She closed her eyes, pressing her muzzle into Briarrose's pelt, breathing in her mother's comforting scent. She thought about Firekit, she didn't think about him often but he was on her mind now. *Please Firekit, please help Owlpaw recover.*

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Honeyfrost eventually returned and instantly rushed into the medicine cat den but the only news that Blossompaw and her family were told was that Owlpaw had whitecough, which normally wasn't as threatning but due to her past history of illness it was hitting her exceptionally hard and they were doing everything they could to prevent it from turning into greencough.

Yarrowtail and Briarrose had told Blossompaw, Oakpaw and Rushpaw to go the apprentice den and keep each other warm while they waited. Blossompaw found herself surrounded by both of her brothers. Blossompaw appreciated what they were doing, being

surrounded by the two of the most important cats in her life made her feel safe.

"Do you think she is gonna be okay?" Blossompaw let out a small whimper.

"I think so." Rushpaw replied quietly. "She's small, but she's not weak and she has Pebblestep and Honeyfrost caring for her. Pebblestep saved her life once, I know she can do it again."

"We need to stay strong for her." Oakpaw added, his voice still had a lingering sense of fear, but it was growing stronger. Blossompaw felt comfort in the words of both of brother's. She knew that Owlpaw wasn't fighting the sickness alone, she had two incredibly skilled medicine cats at her side. *I have to trust that Pebblestep and Honeyfrost will take care of her.*

Blossompaw closed her eyes, she let the warmth of her brother's wash over her, leaving her feeling safe and secure. She listened to their slow, gentle breaths as they overpowered the sound of the slow, bitter wind outside. She enjoyed the peace, she enjoyed the security and she slowly drifted off into sleep with Owlpaw at the center of her thoughts.

*****

The next day came and despite all of them family asking Pebblestep and Honeyfrost they told them that had only woken up briefly before passing back out and she hadn't been coherent. However, Pebblestep assured them that Owlpaw was stable and her fever had gone down and her breathing was improving.

This helped calmed Blossompaw down but she still felt a never ending sense of anxiety weighing on her chest. She didn't know if it would go away until she saw that Owlpaw was awake and recovering, she couldn't focus on anything else.

Luckily, Mudfall had given her time off training until Owlpaw was better. Rushpaw and Oakpaw's mentors had also offered them the same option and Rushpaw took it to get some more sleep, he apparently had not slept well the night before and Blossompaw

didn't blame him, but Oakpaw had pressed Burnclaw to take him hunting or training.

Blossompaw was a bit worried about him, but Yarrowtail assured her that everyone has their own methods of coping and that their aunt, Cinderflame, was the exact same way. Blossompaw and her family had been checked on by all of their family members including Cloudspots, Cherryleaf, Cinderflame, Adderstrike and just about everyone else.

Blossompaw found herself conflicted, she couldn't stand just sitting around doing nothing but she also knew she wouldn't be able to focus on hunting and failing at hunting would just make her feel worse so she kept herself busy by pacing in front of the apprentice den. She had completely cleared away the snow in front of it from her constant walking. She didn't stop until Yarrowtail walked up to her. "You're going to wear yourself out doing that."

"Sorry." She ducked her head and sat down, resting her tail across her paws.

"It's okay to be scared." Yarrowtail say down, his fluffy tail resting across her shoulders. It was soft and comforting. "We're all terrified for Owlpaw."

Something had been pressing on Blossompaw's mind for a while and she decided to finally ask. "How have you been so calm? You've been keeping us all stable, especially our mother."

"I suppose," He sighed a bit. "I've been through a lot of scares and a lot of loss. I remember the fear and panic I felt when Pebblestep was nearly killed by a hawk, the same panic when I lost my mother, the fear of facing Thornstar and potentially losing my whole family, and of course the birth of you five, losing Firekit and almost losing Owlpaw. I'm not used to the panic or fear, I don't think I ever will be I just learned healthy ways to manage to fear and try and keep my hopes alive."

Blossompaw looked up at the pale, cloudy sky as she took in his words. "I suppose I'm not handling it very well. I can't stop panicking and feeling terrified. I don't want to lose my sister, she's

my best friend." Blossompaw whimpered out the last words as she lowered her head and let her body fall against Yarrowtail's.

"You are handling it in your own way, and that is the best way for your." Yarrowtail assured her, resting his chin on her head. "You're still so young, closer to a kit than a warrior. It's so hard for young cats to process their emotions and all three of you have been handling it different but that's okay. I'm proud of how well all three of you are facing this, and I know that when Owlpaw *does* recover, she will be proud too."

Blossompaw could hear how certain that Yarrowtail was in Owlpaw's recover, and she wanted to feel the same way but no matter how hard she tried there was a never ending shadow of anxiety clinging to her heart like a thorn. *I will hold onto his words.* Blossompaw told herself over and over. *Owlpaw will be okay. Owlpaw will be okay.*

Blossompaw remained at her father's side for a while, eventually he got up and got them some prey to share as neither of them had eaten much since Owlpaw collapsed. She had to admit that she really enjoyed spending time with her father despite the circumstances and made a mental note to spend more time with him in the future.

Not long after, Rushpaw came out from the apprentice's den and joined them for some prey as well. It almost felt normal, but the thought that Owlpaw was fighting sickness just across camp still hung over them like a raincloud.

Blossompaw was nearly finished with her squirrel when she a panicked voice crying from the medicine cat den, it belonged to Owlpaw. Blossompaw, Rushpaw and Yarrowtail were instantly on their paws and racing over to the medicine cat den, ignoring Pebblestep's previous orders to stay out.

When they entered the medicine cat they saw a pile of herbs had been kicked to the side and Owlpaw was sitting up in her nest, her pale blue eyes so wide Blossompaw could see the whites peeking out from the sides. Her fur was puffed up, making her almost double in size and she had a genuine fear in her eyes.

Pebblestep and Honeyfrost were desperately trying to calm her down but she was locked in this panicked state. She opened her mouth to speak again and the raw fear and desperation in her voice sent chills down Blossompaw's spine. "War is coming! It's going to tear us apart!"

Chapter 19

Owlpaw was surrounded by pure darkness, and she couldn't feel anything around her. Almost as if she had been suspended in water, but her pelt felt dry. Last she remembered she had been walking behind Blossompaw, surrounded by the harsh cold winds of leaf-bare. However now she felt warm, she felt...safe. *What happened to me?* Owlpaw wondered and attempted to move, but to no avail. She felt as if she had been separated from her physical body. She tried to twitch her paw or tail but was completely unable to.

She struggled to remember what happened, but her mind felt foggy and slow. She briefly recalled falling down into the snow and struggling to breath. *Oh right.* She thought. *I'm sick.* She had ignored Pebblestep's order to take herbs and her sickness had gotten worse. *I should've listened.* She told herself. *What has happened to me now?* She felt as if she had been here before, but she couldn't remember where.

"It's nice to see you again, Owlpaw." A familiar voice filled her mind ,and without realizing it, Owlpaw opened her eyes. She was no longer drifting through empty space, she felt herself sitting on soft grass and she was sitting in an open filed. It was nighttime, but the forest was illuminated by incredibly bright stars and a full moon shining bright above.

She looked directly in front of her and saw the star-covered pelt of Mosscloud forming in front of her. "You've experienced this before, huh, Owlpaw?"

She suddenly remembered what Mosscloud meant. "The river when we were traveling to the mountains. When Mountainstar saved me."

"And when you were born." Mosscloud added, slowly padding over to Owlpaw and sitting across from her.

"Am I dying? Or am I already dead?" Owlpaw ducked her head, she hadn't taken the herbs like Pebblestep had told her to, but she didn't

think she was instantly that sick.

Mosscloud shook her head. "No, you're not dead." She assured her. "But you are quite sick, without herbs you surely would die." Owlpaw's heart twisted slightly and she dropped her head. "But I figured while Pebblestep and Honeyfrost care for you, I could take this time to talk to you." Owlpaw lifted her head slightly. "Why didn't you take the herbs like Pebblestep told you to?"

"Because we need the important herbs for others who might get sick." Owlpaw replied, trying to make Mosscloud understand her reasoning. "They shouldn't be wasted on me."

Mosscloud's expression was unshifting but her eyes gave Owlpaw a curious look. "Would they be wasted of Honeyfrost or Pebblestep took them?"

"Of course not." Owlpaw responded without thinking, but quickly realized the point that Mosscloud was trying to make.

"Then why would they be wasted on you?" Mosscloud tilted her head. "You are a SunClan cat who is currently sick, why save the herbs for cats who aren't even sick yet. You have just as much of a right to herbs as every other SunClan warrior does, and now you've gone and made your entire family worry."

Owlpaw lowered her head, feeling guilt creep into her heart. "I never wanted to make anyone worry, I just wanted to prove that I was no loner the same sickly kit that I used to be."

"They know that already." Mosscloud replied. "Pebbestep told you take herbs not because she thinks you're some weak helpless kit, but because she cares about you and wants you to stay strong. While you are not as weak as you used to be you have to understand that you are also not as strong and healthy as the average warrior. There is nothing wrong with that. You would never consider Pebblestep less than because she has no sense of smell, or that she's blind in one eye, nor would you ever look down on Squirreltail for being completely blind."

"Of course not." Owlpaw sighed. "I just..." She stared at her paws,

watching the gentle breeze carefully rustle the grass. "I just don't want to be a burden on this Clan. Ever since I became a medicine cat I've been happier but I still feel like I'm in the way. Like I'm constantly in the way, tripping over my own paws. I thought I would do so much better as a medicine cat than as a warrior apprentice, but I still feel...out of place."

"You are doing exceptionally well as a medicine cat apprentice, Owlpaw." Mosscloud promised her. "You may struggle, but struggle is natural. I can understand how working with two medicine cats would make you feel like you were in the way, especially when there's no sickness or battles going on, but you still have a purpose as a medicine cat and I do not want to see you give up on this path that you were meant to follow."

"I won't give up." Owlpaw said urgently. "I love being a medicine cat even if I feel like I'm not doing well, I want to do better. When I was a warrior apprentice it all felt hopeless." She glanced up towards the starry sky. "Even if I still feel like I'm struggling, like I'm in the way, I know deep down that this is what I am meant to do."

"I'm very glad to hear that." Mosscloud's soft voice gradually raised into a purr. "You still have a destiny to fulfill."

"What?" Her words genuinely confused Owlpaw. "I thought I already did that by bringing MountainClan home. That was my destiny, right? That's how I was going to change the Clans."

"That was only the beginning." Mosscloud rose to her paws, her gaze turning serious. "I am sorry for what I am about to do, but there is something I must show you."

The look in Mosscloud's eyes made Owlpaw's fur stand on edge and she stood up alongside the old medicine cat. "What do you mean? Why can't you just tell me?"

"I wish I could." Mosscloud sighed. "This is the only way. Just trust me." Owlpaw's entire body tensed up, standing completely stiff as the tortoiseshell she-cat stepped forward and touched her muzzle to Owlpaw's forehead.

In an instant, Owlpaw felt a suddenly jolt and the scent of Mosscloud vanished in an instant. The formerly silent forest became filled with the blood curdling sound of warriors in battle. Yowls of anger, pain and despair filled the air and Owlpaw opened her eyes to see what awaited her as panic gripped her body. She could see the silhouettes of cats fighting ruthlessly.

The sharp tang of blood overpowered anything else, and she could see the forest floor stained with crimson blood. Owlpaw was completely frozen in fear as she realized the fighting was all around her, the cries of death as cats were killed. *This is...war?* She couldn't recognize any of the cats fighting, but she had to assume it was the Clans, who else would it be?

She felt hopeless to do anything as the fighting continued. "Please stop!" She cried out, but her voice fell on deaf ears. "Please!" She kept crying. "Mosscloud help me! Why are you showing me this?" She wanted the medicine cat to return, to save her, but she was no where in sight. "Please help!"

She looked up to the sky for guidance, to hopefully see StarClan cats waiting for her, but what she saw was much worse than what she could've imagined. The full moon was still in the sky, but it had turned a shade of blood red. "*When the blood covers the moon, peace will drown in the ashes of war."*

The voice of Mosscloud entered in her mind, but the medicine cat was still no where to be found. "Mosscloud please! Mosscloud please help me!" She cried, her voice straining from how loud she wailed, trying to drown out the sound of countless warriors dying as they torn themselves apart. "*Please!"*

Owlpaw suddenly shot up, panic surging through her entire body. "Help!" She cried out, but the sounds of battle were gone, tough they still raged in her mind alone. "Mosscloud, please!"

"Owlpaw!" The panicked voice came from Pebblestep and she realized she was back in the medicine cat den with both medicine cats rushing over to her. "Owlpaw, calm down."

"N-no--" She looked around, the scent of blood still thick in her

nose. She heard more pawsteps and saw Yarrowtail along with Blossompaw and Rushpaw. "War is coming! It's going to tear us apart!" She wailed.

"Owlpaw, you need to calm down." Pebblestep moved closer, going to touch her muzzle to Owlpaw's forehead but her panic was still going strong and she ducked away, stumbling back. "Owlpaw, please. Focus on me."

Owlpaw looked at Pebblestep, attempting to focus on her blue eyes. Her heart was pounding painfully in her chest and her lungs burned, struggling to catch any breaths. She managed to ground herself. She realized she was back in the medicine cat den, and no longer watching the horrible horrible vision, but the raw fear of it was still burning like a fresh wound.

"Are you okay?" Pebblestep questioned, her voice gentle but concerned.

Owlpaw couldn't find her voice, so she just nodded slowly and sat back down, she looked past Pebblestep where Yarrowtail and two of her siblings were standing, they looked so horrified. *I must have scared them...* Owlpaw realized.

"Please give us some space." Pebblestep turned to her family. "I'll come let you know whats going on as soon as I can, okay?"

They hesitated for a moment, Owlpaw finally managed to find her voice. "I'm okay" She told them, her voice a lot raspier than she thought it would be. She also felt a sting behind her words. They seemed to listen to her and stepped out of the medicine cat den.

"Before you tell me what happened,," Pebblestep mewed, walking over to the herb store and gathered something. She turned back to Owlpaw and set down catmint in front of her. "Take it." She mewed sternly. Owlpaw nodded and ate the herb. "Why didn't you take it sooner?" Pebblestep demande as she looked over Owlpaw.

"I thought they would be wasted on me, I know now that I was just being stubborn."

"I'm glad you see that now." Pebblestep sighed. "I told you to take them because I care about you, we all do. So stop being so stubborn and listen to us. You scared your entire family have to death."

"I know." Owlpaw whimpered. "I'm sorry."

Pebblestep moved forward and pressed closer to Owlpaw, holding her close. "It's okay, we just need you to take care of your self." She also heard Honeyfrost moving closer as her mentor cuddled up as well.

"We love you, Owlpaw." Honeyfrost mewed. "And you matter just as much as any other cat in SunClan."

The three medicine cats shared the tender moment together for several moments and Owlpaw felt safe again, the fear from her dream was slowly fading away, but it still clung to her mind. She wasn't sure if she would be able to ever shake it.

"Now," Both Pebblestep and Honeyfrost stepped back. "When you woke up you started shouting about war, what did you mean by that?"

Suddenly all the memories of the vision came flowing back, she felt her body shake slightly. "Well...I was talking to Mosscloud...but when we finished she said she had something to show me and what she showed me was...horrifying." She stared at her paws.

"You can tell us." Honeyfrost assured her, touching her tail to Owlpaw's flank.

Owlpaw took a deep breath as she prepared to remember the dream. "I was surrounded by fighting cats, all I could hear was the sounds of battle and all I could smell was blood. It was so horrible, I could hear cats dying and screaming in pain." Her voice faltered for a moment, but she managed to push through her fear. "Then I looked up and saw the moon, but it was bright red. Then I heard Mosscloud speak to me. She said "*When the blood covers the moon, peace will drown in the ashes of war."* I started to really panic and then I woke up here."

"That sounds like a bad omen." Pebblestep sighed. "I've seen blood moons before, but this sounds like the next one we see will be a warning sign for some kind of war. Though things have been very peaceful lately, we haven't had so much of an argument with Riverstar lately."

It briefly felt as if Pebblestep wasn't listening to her or taking her seriously. "But it was clearly a warning, something bad--"

Pebblestep raised her tail, silencing Owlpaw. "We can discuss this with Dawnstar after you have recovered. You're still sick."

Owlpaw almost felt scared to go back to sleep, she knew that something terrible was going to happen and she wished Pebblestep would treat it more urgently but she knew that she had to rest. "Okay..." Owlpaw said quietly and laid back down.

"StarClan trusted you with this prophecy, which means that they know you will be able to handle this, and the rest of us will help." She touched her tail tip to Owlpaw's nose. "For now, focus on getting some rest."

"I'll try." Owlpaw let out a breath. She still felt the fear of her dream burning brightly in her mind and the heavy weight of the omen weighing on her shoulders. *What am I supposed to do? How am I suppose to stop a war? Why did this message have to be for me?*

Chapter 20

The moorland passed by as nothing but a white blur as the paws of Leopardpaw hit the ground at high speeds. Her legs carried her limb body across the moorland with ease, kicking up flurries of snow as she moved with ease. She couldn't feel the harsh cold air as her pumping blood kept her body warm. Her target came into view, the small rock pile near the back end MoonClan's territory. Beside it stood Berryheart, Tallsong and Ripplepaw.

Almost there. Leopardpaw told herself, pushing herself to run even faster. She made it to the rockpile very quickly after it came into view. She gradually slowed herself down until she came to a graceful stop beside the rockpile and her Clanmates. "Very good." Berryheart purred. "You were even quicker than your brother."

Leopardpaw looked at her brother, he didn't look upset by the comment, he looked proud of his sister. "Yeah," Leopardpaw mewed as she took a few seconds to catch her breath. "But he's always been better at catching fish than me, and he's stronger."

Ripplepaw let out a purr. "You are great at catching rabbits with your speed." Leopardpaw gently touched her tail to her brother's flank, she treasured the relationship they had. There was never any arguing or showing off between each other. Peachblossom had raised them to respect each other and encourage one another. Breezetail also encouraged the same, making sure that on the off chance they did have an argument or disagreement, they could overcome it.

Leopardpaw was certain the only times they had argued was when they were very young and it was over who got the first bite of prey that Breezetail brought them. "You both did incredibly well." Tallsong chimed, happily waving her tail. "You both are natural born runners, a true mark of a MoonClan warrior. Now let's head back to camp and you two can get some prey."

Leopardpaw felt warmed by the praise of both mentors as they

ventured through the snow back to MoonClan camp. Now that she was no longer running, she could feel the cold a lot more but it still didn't bother her that much. She knew that the other Clans struggled a lot to stay warm but MoonClan cats didn't seem to struggle as much. She wasn't sure if they had thicker coats or what, but she loved the snow. She found it beautiful and serene, she loved watching the unique flakes fall and make a shimmering coat of snow on the moorland. Though she did avoid swimming.

They reached the MoonClan camp after a short walk and Tallsong and Berryheart dismissed the two apprentices to get some prey. Leopardpaw followed her brother towards the fresh kill pile. During the cold seasons, MoonClan kept their fresh-kill in a small buried hollow covered by lose moss and heather.

"What do you want?" Ripplepaw asked as he looked through the fresh-kill pile.

"Is there any rabbits?" Leopardpaw tilted her head.

"Yeah, I'll leave the big one for the elders." Ripplepaw stuck his head into the hollow and grabbed a medium sized rabbit. The two of them walked a nearby clump of dead brush and sat beside it to begin sharing the prey.

Leopardpaw bit into the rabbit, the food making her feel a lot comfier after her long sprint from one end of the territory to the other. "How's the rest of your training been going?" Ripplepaw asked, they trained quite a bit together but not always. Leoparpdaw had mostly been focused on her hunting and running skills.

"It's been good." Leopardpaw purred, waving her tail. "I love running, and I can almost keep up with our father."

"That's good." Ripplepaw meowed softly. "I want the weather to get warmer so I can get back to swimming. I was doing really good with it but I haven't been able to swim since it started snowing." Her brother had always loved swimming, when they had just started their swimming lessons, he was instantly into the water while she had to take her time.

The two siblings continued to eat their prey when she spotted a patrol returning, it was lead by Brokenclaw and had Ashfeather, Ferretpelt, Mosswind and Swanfeather. She noticed that Brokenclaw had an annoyed and disgruntled expression on his face. He stopped walking, said something to his patrol mates then headed straight for Shadowstar who was sitting outside of his den with Feathercloud sharing tongues, huddled close together.

Brokenclaw said something to Shadowstar who let out a sigh, he called out to Violetfur who was sharing prey with Icepool. Violetfur instantly stood up, said something to Icepool and swiftly dashed over to Shadowstar and Brokenclaw. Shadowstar touched his nose to Feathercloud and vanished inside of his den while Feathercloud padded over to talk with her fellow elders.

I hope everything is okay. Leopardpaw said silently. Tensions with AshClan have not gone down at all, luckily the two Clans didn't interact much but ever since Riverstar visited, the tension and stress had remained in the energy of the MoonClan cats. Leopardpaw had been doing her best not to think about it, but she could remain ignorant for only so long. She forced her attention away from the leader's den and back to the prey she shared with her brother and listened to a story he told about a bird he caught.

He finished his story and the two of them finished their prey, both siblings decided to wash themselves after finishing their prey and just about as she was going to get up and see if Berryheart had anything else for her today, Shadowstar, Violetfur and Brokenclaw stepped out of the leader's den.

Both Shadowstar and Violetfur shared the same expression that Brokenclaw had arrived with. She watched as Shadowstar jumped onto the small pile of rocks in the center of MoonClan camp. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather for a Clan meeting!" Leoparpdaw could hear the tension in Shadowstar's voice, she shared a concerned glance with Ripplepaw but the two of them gathered as well.

They sat beside Peachblossom and Breezetail and watched the rest of the Clan gather. She noticed Shellpaw and his siblings sitting not far from them as well, she noticed they all looked as anxious and

Leopardpaw felt. She briefly met Shellpaw's blue gaze, the older apprentice seemed quite concerned. She gave him a tiny nod, trying to make him feel a bit better, but she didn't think it helped.

They both turned their attention to Shadowstar who stood proudly over his Clan. It was at this moment, with the sunlight reflecting off his black coat that she noticed how gray the leader was becoming. With lighter fur around his muzzle and eyes and laced across his body. Despite his age, Shadowstar still stood tall and proud.

"Cats of MoonClan, as we discussed several days ago tensions between us and AshClan have been rising. Arguments at gatherings and disrespect from Riverstar and her warriors. MoonClan has a long history of peace, we pride ourselves on being the most peaceful of the Clans." Leopardpaw nodded slowly, it was one of the things that made her most proud to have been born a MoonClan cat. "However," There was a slight edge to his voice that made Leopardpaw lose her comfort. "This can sometimes make us look like easy targets for the other Clans, especially AshClan. Riverstar thinks that since we are the "peaceful Clan" that we will just stand and let her walk all over us, well I am telling you all today that is not the case."

Leopardpaw noticed Violetfur sitting beside Shadowstar, holding her head high. "I instructed certain patrols to make heavy markings on the other side of the river because I had a feeling Riverstar would be patrolling there, and I was right. It was a challenge and Riverstar accepted. Brokenclaw's patrol reported that our scent had been completely covered by the stench of AshClan."

Marking borders on the other side of the river? Leopardpaw exchanged a confused and worrisome glance with Ripplepaw. *That territory doesn't belong to anyone, can we even mark borders there?*

"It has become clear to me that the peaceful time of the Clans is coming to an end, at least between MoonClan and AshClan. I will not let our Clan be taken advantage of by Riverstar and her Clan of battle hungry warriors. At this point, a battle is a matter of when, not if and MoonClan will not be caught off guard. We must be prepared for Riverstar to take the fight directly to us because I know she will."

Leopardpaw tensed up, and she could feel Ripplepaw beside her do the same. *Is there really going to be a fight between our Clans?* She wondered. *Leafdawn and Slatepaw always talked so highly of Riverstar, why would she start a fight like this?* "Starting tomorrow we need to start refining our battle skills. Apprentices need more training and warriors need to sharpen their skills. We haven't fought a battle since Echoheart's assault and we must be prepared."

Leopardpaw noticed Shadowstar's yellow eyes scanning the crowd of MoonClan cats. "I can see that you are all concerned, I understand this, but I also want to remind all of you that while peaceful, MoonClan is not a Clan to be trifled with. MoonClan cats are strong, we are fast. We thrive under the stars, with our ancestors watching over us. Riverstar may attack, but we will drive her and her warriors out and they will know to *never* attack MoonClan again!"

The words of Shadowstar seemed to resonate with all of MoonClan, even Leopardpaw began to feel the pride of her Clan rushing through her body. The warriors let out cheers of pride. Leopardpaw still felt uncertain, but she trusted her leader and she trusted her Clanmates around her. She glanced up slowly towards the sky, watching the sun beam down through the snowy clouds. *I will defend my Clan, no matter what.*

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"You've all had battle training," Brokenclaw spoke up, looking over the group of apprentices. "But not nearly enough. It's time we sharpen all of your skills, because none of you have ever actually been in a real fight."

"That's not entirely true." It was Berryheart who spoke up. "Leopardpaw and I fought against a band of rouges while traveling."

"Rouges are not the same as fighting fully trained warriors, especially AshClan warriors."

"That is true," Berryheart nodded her head respectfully. "Rouges fight to kill, warriors do not. Regardless of who she fought, Leopardpaw here is the only apprentice who has fought another

cat."

Brokenclaw looked at Leoparpdaw, she flight slightly intimidated by the large black tabby. He was a very strong senior warrior, and he was arguably one of the strongest in in MoonClan. "Your experience will help you, but for now I'm training you as if you don't have any. Understand?"

"Yes." Leopardpaw said sheepishly. He gave a short nod and looked over the other apprentices, all five of them had gathered.

"Three of you are very close to becoming warriors." He mewed, looking over Shellpaw, Meadowpaw and Minnowpaw. "I know you've all been waiting a long time, so I promise you that if this battle takes place, you will all be made very honorable warriors."

Leopardpaw looked at the three apprentices, neither of them seemed to be upset about not having their warrior ceremony. They all looked happy to serve their Clan. "We have an odd number of you so you'll have to take turns practicing with each other. Two of you will be together and one of you will be with one of the mentors. We'll start with Ripplepaw and Meadowpaw, Leopardpaw and Shellpaw, and Minnowpaw and Swiftheart. We will let you know when it's time to change partners."

"You will start by practicing a shoulder drop." Tallsong spoke up. "You will grab your opponent by the shoulders, allowing you to pin them down and lock them into place. This allows you to take control of the fight. Allow us to demonstrate." She looked at Icepool who stood beside Tallsong.

Leopardpaw watched as Icepool stepped away and braced herself for Tallsong's attack. Leopardpaw watched the black she-cat charged towards the white one, her paws grabbed Icepool's shoulders and she was shoved to the ground, Tallsong had her completely pinned and Icepool struggled beneath her grip.

Tallsong continued her attack by gently kicking Icepool's lower back to show just how much she controlled the fight now. After a moment, Tallsong stepped back and allowed Icepool to stand up. "You will take turns attacking each other, but remember not to hurt

each other. This is training, not a real fight."

With a nod, the apprentices split into their respective groups and Leopardpaw faced Shellpaw. She hadn't gotten to talk to him much, aside form occasional conversations but he always seemed to be a kind-hearted, hard working apprentice. "So I get the one apprentice here with experience." He spoke, his voice teasing but friendly. "Make sure to go easy on me." The playful look in his eyes seem to take a lot of fear off her shoulders.

"They weren't the most well trained rouges." Leopardpaw let out a slight giggle. "I imagine you could've taken them on pretty easily."

"Maybe." He stretched out, preparing for them to begin their training. "But while you were fighting them I was stuck in the medicine cat den injured."

Leopardpaw blinked, realizing she had never actually known the cause of Shellpaw's injury. "So what happened? How did you get injured?"

"It was just a few days after you left, actually. I was hunting by the river when I slipped on some stones. Fell into the river and dislocated my shoulder, I was out of training for half a moon but as soon as Oneflight let me out I almost immediately aggravated the injury again so he kept off duties for another half-moon and even after that I had to be careful. I only got back on full duties a few days before you returned."

"Sounds rough." Leopardpaw said, her tone gentle. "I'm really sorry that happened to you, I'm glad you're alright."

"It was my own fault." Shellpaw chuckled. "Don't feel too bad for me, I might just do again for to feel some sympathy."

There was something else about his tone that felt...soft. Leopardpaw let out a purr but noticed Brokenclaw glaring at them. "You're not going to win a fight by talking, Shellpaw." Shellpaw didn't look at all intimidated or nervous by Brokenclaw's words. Something told Leopardpaw this wasn't the first time he had gotten scolded.

"We should get started though, don't want us falling behind the others. You attack first." Shellpaw declared, standing tall and facing Leopardpaw. She realized now that he was quite larger than she was. He was muscular or broad shouldered like Brokenclaw, but his legs and body were long and lean, she had to remind herself that Shellpaw was almost a full warrior, and probably should've been already. *I can do this.* Leopardpaw told herself. She had fought full grown rouges when she was at Mountainstar's home.

Though she hadn't been joking when she said Shellpaw could have easily taken one of them on. *But this isn't a real fight. I can do this.* She told herself and replayed the actions of Tallsong in her mind.

She stepped back and leapt forward, Shellpaw dodged her first attack but she recovered quickly. She used her speed to her advantage and moved before he could dodge her attack, she leapt up to make the distance between them and grabbed Shellpaw's shoulders with all her might.

She pushed her weight into him and together the two apprentices fell to the ground, she briefly had Shellpaw pinned but she tumbled forward and lost her grip. She landed on the soft moorland, creating a puff of powdered snow as she fell. Leopardpaw's pelt burned with embarrassment as she failed the attack in such a spectacular way.

"Well that's one way to do it." Shellpaw chuckled as she stood up, shaking the snow off his speckled coat. "Come on," He padded over to her and nudged her to her paws. "Try again. You've got the speed, you just need the strength."

Leopardpaw met his gaze, it wasn't judging or teasing, it was encouraging. She felt comforted by his words and stood back up. She faced Shellpaw once again, and feeling better about herself, she attacked.

This time she managed to predict his first dodge and grabbed his shoulders. This time she used her strength as best she could, holding tightly onto his shoulders and pinning him to the ground. She felt like she didn't have the strongest grip on him, but she still had control over the fight.

"Good work, Leopardpaw." Berryheart's confirmation gave Leopardpaw the sign to let him up.

"See?" Shellpaw mewed, waving his tail happily. "I knew you could do it."

Leopardpaw let out a purr, she wished she could keep training with Shellpaw but she knew she would have to train with the others eventually. The training session continued, and Leopardpaw felt herself improve each time she did it.

After all the apprentices had trained with each other and one warrior, the session was over. Leopardpaw felt sore and exhausted, but also invigorated. She enjoyed battle training, but deep down she knew that the fun aspects of battle training would be short lived. As they stopped focusing on their training the reality set back in. *There is a very high chance we will be fighting AshClan with these moves.* She breathed out a quiet sigh to herself as the group of MoonClan cats made their way back to camp to rest for the night.

"You doing alright?" She heard the voice of Shellpaw suddenly beside her.

"Yeah." Leopardpaw looked up at him. "Just a bit tired after training."

"You're a bad liar." Shellpaw gave her a coy look. Leopardpaw ducked her head. *Is it that obvious?* "I'm sure you're nervous about fighting AshClan, but I doubt it's going to be that big of a deal."

"Why do you say that?" Leopardpaw questioned, wondering how he sounded so confident.

"I've listened to the elder's tell stories about Riverstar and AshClan's history. She doesn't want to kill, she just wants to flaunt her strength. If there is a fight then Riverstar will be the one to start it. They'll come here all soaking wet from swimming across the river and half freezing to death, then us MoonClan cats will overpower them and drive them out. Riverstar will run with her tail between her legs and she'll know not to mess with MoonClan again."

"You seem so confident about it." Leopardpaw looked up Shellpaw, he seemed so certain with his words. Like he was telling a story.

"That's what all the warriors are telling me." Shellpaw assured her. "Warriors aren't supposed to kill. We may get some injures, but we'll be alright. Don't you worry." Leopardpaw couldn't deny the certainty in his eyes. Shellpaw was confident and so were the warriors of MoonClan. She had to remind herself to trust her Clanmates, they would keep each other safe and just as Shellpaw had said, the battle would be over quickly.

Chapter 21

"Take a deep breath, and hold it." Pebblestep instructed and Owlpaw did as she was told. She breathed in and held her breath, she could feel her lungs aching and starting to burn as she struggled to hold her breath. "Go ahead and exhale." Owlpaw breathed out, the action quickly followed by a series of coughing.

"Your breathing is still very rough." Pebblestep mewed, and Owlpaw couldn't help but feel that she was stating the obvious. "But it has improved from yesterday. Continue to take herbs and you should continue to recover."
"Do you think I'll be able to go to the Spirit Garden on the half-moon?" Owlpaw questioned, she didn't want to miss the half-moon journey. She was hoping to see Mosscloud to speak about the vision she had been given about the blood moon.

"It's not impossible." Pebblestep replied, waving her tail. "But that's if you take time to rest and take plenty of herbs. If you do just that I imagine you will be recovered by then."

"I'll take the herbs." Owlpaw promised, dipping her head as she let out another series of coughs, her throat burning after.

"Let me get them." Pebblestep turned away and ventured towards the herb store where she returned with a bundle of herbs. Owlpaw identified them as catmint, chickweed and juniper berries. Owlpaw had grown used to these herbs when she was younger, with the exception of catmint which was usually replaced with tansy.

She ate the herbs without complaint and looked up to see Pebblestep returning with a small stick in her jaws, on the end was a medium sized glob of honey. Owlpaw licked up the honey as well, feeling nearly instant relief as it soothed her burning and sore throat. When she finished, Pebblestep discarded the stick.

"Get some rest, then you can have some prey. I don't think you're contagious anymore so I'll tell your family they can visit you."

"Alright, thank you Pebblestep." Owlpaw nodded and curled up in her nest. She felt a nagging sensation of uselessness as she hadn't preformed any of her medicine cat duties since she collapsed. She was enjoying her rest, and she had promised both medicine cats as well as her family that she would get plenty of rest. She just wished she would recover sooner.

She rested her her chin on her paws and idly watched as Pebblestep and eventually Honeyfrost began working around the den, doing their daily tasks. She gradually began to drift off to their words, talking about how Sandfoot had a minor cough and had been given coltsfoot and honey and how all kits were still healthy. Owlpaw's grew heavy and she gradually drifted off into sleep.

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Owlpaw opened her eyes and found herself somewhere in SunClan territory. She looked around, she realized quickly that she was near the MoonClan border. The moon was high in the sky, shining bright and thankfully, not red. She breathed out a sigh of relief and tried to gage what was going on.

She was alone, she couldn't scent any other cats nearby and she couldn't feel the cold despite the snow falling around here. "Is anyone there?" She called out, only to be met with silence. Owlpaw twitched her ear and began looking around, trying to find anything to show her why she was here.

For some reason, Owlpaw found herself drawn to the MoonClan border. Her paws lead her that way, stopping her at the first river. She glanced across both rivers and into the moorland. *I wonder how MountainClan is doing.* She asked herself, she hoped that there had been no sickness. *I wonder if any kits will be born there soon?* She found herself trying to picture life in MountainClan, she just hoped they were all doing alright. *I can ask Mothflower all this at the half-moon, as long as I recover.*

Owlpaw sat down, watching the snow fall and the gentle breeze carry the flakes across the forest. She took a deep breathing, actually enjoying the tranquility. She was happily enjoying the peaceful night when she heard the sound of wings flapping.

Her attention was directed upwards as she saw a snowy owl circling above her. She didn't feel threatened by the owl, she had seen it before. This time it didn't scare the pelt off her though, like it did the time she had been sharing prey with her siblings.

She watched the owl closely and watched it land on a tall oak branch above her. She met the owl's golden gaze meeting her own. She studied the owl's expression, she knew it couldn't talk but it almost seemed like it wanted to tell her something.

"Do you have something to show me?" Owlpaw questioned, feeling crazy for talking to an owl. "You always seem to be a sign rom StarClan, so what do you have to show me?" The owl fluffed up its feathers, letting out a quiet cry at Owlpaw. She flicked her ears.

"I know my name is Owlpaw," She mewed, not sure why she was joking with a bird. "But that doesn't mean I speak owl."

The snowy owl let out another cry, this time it followed by taking off from its branch and flying away, towards the direction of MoonClan territory. For a brief moment, Owlpaw felt a burning urge to follow the beautiful bird, but she stayed put. In the distance she could hear the owl cry once more, this time louder and it sounded almost pleading.

Owlpaw breathed out a sigh, her breath billowing out in front of her in the cold, bitter air. "I wish I knew what you wanted of me." She looked down at her paws. "I'm growing tired of signs and prophecies and omens." She glanced up towards the glowing moon. "I just want to be a good medicine cat."

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Owlpaw's eyes opened as the scene around her faded away. She lifted her head and realized she was back in the medicine cat den. She had fallen asleep around early morning and upon peering outside the den entrance from her nest, she could tell that it was not long before sunset. She let out a few coughs before sitting up and stretching. She was grateful that her dream had been peaceful, and she hadn't witnessed another horrifying nightmare of war and bloodshed, something that she hadn't been able to shake since it

happened.

"How are you feeling?" She turned her head towards the back of the den where Honeyfrost was, setting out herbs to dry.

"I feel alright." Owlpaw replied, and despite her raspy voice she wasn't lying. "Not perfect, but better. I dreamt about an owl again."

"They always seem to follow you." Honeyfrost purred. "I wouldn't worry too much about you, I doubt StarClan would shove so much onto one medicine cat apprentice." Honeyfrost touched her muzzle to Owlpaw's forehead for a brief moment. "Don't worry too much about it." Owlpaw looked up at her mentor gratefully, feeling soothed by her words of encouragement.

"Your family wants to visit you, but we don't want our den overcrowded, so you'll parents will be visiting you first. I'll let them know you're awake and to bring you some prey. Take some more honey to soothe your throat."

As Honeyfrost left to go get her parents, Owlpaw retreated herself a small bundle of honey secured by an oak leaf. She licked the honey off the leaf, once again feeling the instant soothing affects of it.

A few moments later, Honeyfrost returned with Yarrowtail and Briarrose behind her. Yarrowtail had two small squirrels in his jaws and Briarrose immediately rushed past Honeyfrost, nearing knocking her over, as she ran to Owlpaw.

"How are you feeling?" Briarrose questioned frantically, sniffing all over Owlpaw, nearly knocking her over as well.

"I'm fine and fine." Owlpaw promised her mother. "I'm still coughing and I have a sore throat, but I feel a lot better."

Luckily, Briarrose seemed to relax at her words. "You worry so much." Yarrowtail spoke after setting down the pieces of prey. "I told you that she's in good paws with Pebblestep and Honeyfrost."

"I know, I know." Briarrose sighed, stepping away from Owlpaw and sitting down. "I almost lost her once before, I'm too terrified of it happening again."

Owlpaw looked at her paws for a moment, she felt a familiar feeling creep in. She didn't like the way Briarrose treated her, like she was a fragile kit ready to fall apart at the slightest breeze. "I'm stronger than I look." Owlpaw spoke, trying to muster all the confidence she had. She met Briarrose's gaze and sat up tall.

Briarrose gaze softened and she let out a sigh. "I know that, Owlpaw." She leaned forward, pressing her forehead against Owlpaws. "I know you made an incredibly journey and you are not the weak little kit you were when you were born, but I will never stop worrying about your or any of your siblings for that matter. I am your mother, it's my job."

Owlpaw could feel that her words were genuine. She had heard stories about how Briarrose had always lacked confident and been slightly anxious due to the history and abuse from her father, Thornstar. The scars on her cheek were given to her by her own father, Owlpaw tried her best to sympathize with her mother, she was lucky to have Yarrowtail who loved and cared deeply for her siblings.

"I'll be careful," Owlpaw said quietly as Briarrose stepped back. "I promise." *She does have a reason to worry about me, though. After I failed to take the herbs and collapsed.*

"Thank you, Owlpaw." Briarrose purred. "And I'll do my best not to fret so much over you."

"Thank you." Owlpaw thanked her mother, feeling comforted by her words and how genuine they sounded.

"Now let's eat," Yarrowtail spoke up. "You need to gain as much strength as possible if you're going to recover." Owlpaw's appetite hadn't fully recovered, but she did feel her stomach growling. She shared the two squirrels with her family and felt her strength slowly returning as she ate.

She could only hope that her recovery would continue to be this smooth and she could make it to the half-moon in a few days. *I have so many questions for StarClan, I need answers.*

Chapter 22

Mountainstar struggled to focus on her hunting, between the harsh cold and the anxieties and doubt burning deep in her mind. She had managed to catch two squirrels but her paws felt numb from the cold and she could barely focus on anything she was doing. It had only been a few days since Flintfoot left and he hadn't returned, there hadn't been a single sign of him except for his fading scent trail towards the path they took to enter the territory.

I know he doesn't believe in you. Mountainstar thought, glancing towards the pale sky. *But please keep him safe.* She didn't know why there was a part of that expected Flintfoot to return, she was the one who told him to leave after all.

Their entire interaction played in her mind over and over, and she desperately wished she could go back and do things different from the very start. She would trust Flintfoot more, she would help him understand why the warrior code and borders were so important to begin with. *But you can't go back.* Nettleheart's voice echoed in her mind. Her deputy had been telling her the same thing over the past few days.

She was grateful for Nettleheart, the past several days she had been keeping Mountainstar grounded as much as she could. She only seemed to feel peace when Nettleheart was at her side, she had been sharing a den with her every night since Flintfoot left. She felt relief whenever she woke up and saw that Nettleheart was with her. *As long as I have her, I can get through this.* Mountainstar told herself.

She decided to head back to camp, giving up on her hunting mission. She found her two squirrels and started the long walk back to camp. She had found herself near the river border with the gathering hollow, and she was taking her time walking back to camp.

She couldn't help but feel like she had disappointed her Clan. Many of them assured her this wasn't the case, but she still couldn't shake

the everlasting feeling of guilt that shadowed her. Deep down she knew that she that she had to stop sulking in her own self-guilt, she was a Clan leader and she needed to act like it.

During the rest of her walk back to camp she did her bes to let her mind clear and to let her problems melt away like the snow under her paws, but it wasn't easy. She finally reached camp and looked around. It seemed as if most of her warriors were hiding away from the harsh cold weather. She could see the stone floor of their camp covered in many pawprints, but the camp seemed almost empty.

She was fairly certain that Nettleheart was leading a patrol right now, so she would have to wait to see her. Mountainstar nestled her fresh-kill away in the small crack in the stone wall where they kept all their prey. She looked around briefly, making sure that everything seemed okay before returning to her den.

She had moved her nest to the back of the den and added extra moss so she could stay warm, but it had been a lot easier with Nettleheart sharing the den with her. Mountainstar would have to make due without her for now. She settled in her nest in the back corner of her den, tucking her paws underneath her chest.

She rested her chin down on the plush moss and closed her eyes. She tried her best to keep her mind clear and free of the stress that had been plaguing her the past several days. *Even if I failed Flintfoot, I can make it up to the rest of my warriors. I have to make it up. I just have to.*

****

"Mountainstar." A voice spoke through the darkness. Her eyes flittered open, just realizing that she had fallen asleep. She opened her eyes to see Nettleheart standing in front of her, a plump vole sitting at her paws. "Good morning." Nettleheart said, her voice soft. "Or evening, I should say."

Mountainstar yawned and sat up, stretching out her limbs. "I didn't mean to fall asleep." She explained.

"You don't need to justify yourself." Nettleheart assured her. "There's

not much to do when it's this cold. I'm sure plenty of our warriors are doing the same. In fact I'm sure of it." She sat down across from Mountainstar and nudged the vole towards her. "Now eat up, I figured the two of us could share this. I caught it by the river while on a hunting patrol."

"Thank you." Mountainstar was more than willing to share prey with Nettleheart, taking a bite of the prey. She didn't realize until her mouth started watering at the taste that she hadn't eaten all day.

"How are you feeling?" Nettleheart questioned after taking her own bite. "You still seem very distant from the Clan."

Mountainstar swallowed her bite of prey and let out a sigh. "I'm trying my best to feel better about the whole situation, but I can't help but feel like I failed him. Like I should've been a better leader."

"Mountainstar you--"

"I know what you're going to say." Mountainstar quieted her deputy. "And I do appreciate it. I suppose I feel better than I did when he left, but I still don't feel right. While I was out hunting alone I told myself that I need to be better for the warriors that did stay, and I just hope I can do just that."

"Of course you can." Nettleheart spoke up. Mountainstar met her intense amber gaze. "StarClan chose you to be leader after all."

Mountainstar let out a slight chuckle. "I don't often hear you mention StarClan."

"Well I still don't really know how to feel." Nettleheart admitted. "But you believe in them, and I believe in you."

For some reason, Nettleheart's words made her heart skip a beat. "I never thought StarClan could be real, I was surprised when I found out they were, and while I know that StarClan is here to guide us, I would be lost without *your* guidance."

Mountainstar noticed a playful and slightly bashful glint in Nettleheart's eyes. "Please, I'm just some former rouge."

"You're a lot more than that to me." Mountainstar rose to her paws and took a step closer to Nettleheart who matched her in standing up. "I wouldn't be able to do this without you, Nettleheart, any of it. There is a reason I made you my deputy."

"I am honored to serve as your deputy, Mountainstar." Nettleheart took a step closer, her muzzle nearly touching Mountainstar's. Her heart began pounding in her chest as she looked deep into the beautiful amber pools of Nettleheart's eyes. "But there is a part of me that would like to be more than just your deputy."

In her entire life, Mountainstar had never felt this kind of feeling before. She had heard stories of it before, she heard it in the way that her father talked about her mother. She never had a chance to feel it, she had found Sparrowpaw, Wrenpaw and Finchpaw had such a young age, she never even considered taking a mate or falling in love. *Until now.*

Mountainstar opened her mouth to respond, she knew what Nettleheart wanted and she wanted it too. "Nettleheart I--"

"Mountainstar." A new voice spoke, shattering the soft moment between Nettleheart and Mountainstar. She looked past Nettleheart to see Troutstream standing in the den entrance. "Antwhisker and a few other warriors say they need to talk to you."

Mountainstar looked at Nettleheart who looked as confused as Mountainstar felt. "I'll be right there." She told Troutstream and the brown warrior quickly vanished from view. She looked at Nettleheart who had stepped back. "We'll continue this conversation after, okay?"

"I'll hold you to it." Nettleheart purred, brushing her tail under Mountainstar's chin. "Now let's go see what they need."

Mountainstar and Nettleheart walked side by side out of her den and down into the camp. She saw that snow had stopped and MountainClan was more active. Her eyes traveled to a particular cluster of warriors where she saw Antwhisker. He was standing with Yewtail and Gingersky, she also noticed that Mothflower was with them as well. The skittish medicine cat almost never left her

den so it was shocking to see her with her Clanmates.

Mountainstar approached the small group of warriors, she attempted to read their expressions and they all seemed uncertain. "Troutstream told me you needed to talk to me."

"That's right." Antwhisker spoke up, facing Mountainstar. She looked past him briefly to see Riverstep looking at him slightly confused.

"What is it? Is everything okay?"

"Yes and no." Antwhisker sighed. "Some of us have been talking for a while, long before Flintfoot even left." *Why is he brining up Flintfoot?* "And we have come to the conclusion that this isn't the life for us."

His words made Mountainstar's heart drop to her paws. "What-what do you mean?"
"It's nothing that you did, Mountainstar." Gingersky spoke up next, stepping up to stand beside Antwhisker. "And it's not because of what Flintfoot said either, but the borders, the warrior code, StarClan..." She looked at Yewtail. "It's all too much for us."

"So you're leaving?" It was Nettleheart who responded.

"Yes." Yewtail nodded. "We were never meant to live these lives, maybe the rest of you were but not us. I miss living on my own time, without borders and without rules."

Mountainstar stared blankly at the warriors before her. *I failed them too. I wasn't good enough to keep them here.* "Antwhisker you can't leave!" A new cry brought Mountainstar back to the scenario at hand. The voice came from Riverstep who had ran up to Antwhisker. "You can't go, I'm expecting your kits!"

Kits? Mountainstar's gaze quickly shifted to Riverstep, she noticed that the she-cat's belly was growing despite the lack of prey in the forest. Antwhisker looked equally as shocked. "You can come with me. I can take care of our kits."

Riverstep shared at him for a few moments before stepping back

and shaking her head. "I don't want to, I want to stay here." She whimpered. "I love being a warrior, I love being part of a Clan. Our kits are going to be the first MountainClan kits born, they're going to be special!"
Antwhisker sighed. "They're not going to be anymore special that any other kit born in the world, Riverstep, but we could have them together and show them the world."

"My kits won't survive out there in this cold. Here I have an entire Clan of warriors to protect and hunt for them and a safe home to raise them in. I know they will grow up to be strong and brave and to be warriors."

"I can protect them just as much outside." Antwhisker argued.

"You can't change my mind, Antwhisker." Riverstep responded, lashing her tail. "We were supposed to raise our kits together here, as warriors."

"And you can't change my mind either." Antwhisker said sternly, causing Riverstep to wince.

"Then I suppose you'll never get to meet your kits." She turned away, dragging her tail through the snow where she went directly to her two sisters, Hazelspring and Briarfall, who instantly began comforting her while glaring at Antwhisker.

Antwhisker let out a sigh and turned back to Mountainstar. "I'm sorry, Mountainstar, but this is our decision. We thank you for giving us a chance to be warriors, but it just wasn't meant to be."

Mountainstar didn't know what to say, she couldn't find any words. She just felt like she had failed even more of her warriors. *What could I have done better?* She wanted to bed and plead them to stay, but she couldn't. She couldn't do that. She looked to Nettleheart who looked just as shocked, and a little mad, but she gave Mountainstar and encouraging nod, and lightly touched her tail to Mountainstar's flank.

"I'm sorry that you all feel this way." She finally managed to find the words. "I valued you all as warriors, and I apologize that I

wasn't able to make you three feel welcome as warriors."

"You did, Mountainstar." Gingersky responded. "You are a great leader, we just aren't fit for the lives of warriors. Everyone else here is." She looked around at the surrounding warriors. "They will serve you just fine, I'm sure. Not us though."

Mountainstar dipped her head, she was doing everything in her power to keep her composure despite the raging storm of emotions inside of her. "I wish you all the best, and if you ever wish to return, you are always welcome as MountainClan warriors." Gingersky gave a nod as did Yewtail, but Antwhisker was clearly upset about what happened with Riverstep.

"I'm leaving as well." The timid voice that spoke up is one that broke Mountainstar's composure. She looked up to see that Mothflower had approached the other three warriors.

"Mothflower..." Mountainstar's voice trembled. "You can't leave us, we need you. You are our medicine cat, StarClan--"

"StarClan chose wrong!" Mothflower cried out. "Or Owlpaw did, or I don't know who chose me to do this but it certainly wasn't me." She shook her head. "You don't know what being a medicine cat is like. I couldn't even treat Sorrelfern's wound, it was Oneflight who did that and I don't think I could handle that again." She looked at her paws. "I've been nothing but a failure since I got here, I know you believe in me, but I don't." She lifted her head, meeting Mountainstar's gaze. "I'm sorry to fail you one more time, but at least I won't have to worry about disappointing you all even more."

The announcement of Mothflower leaving definitely rocked the entire Clan, they had all been told how important the role of medicine cat was and in the dead of leaf-bare. *I'm failing. My Clan is falling apart and there's nothing I can do to stop this.* She could tell the young she-cat was waiting for a response, but Mountainstar couldn't find the right words. She didn't feel like a leader right now, she didn't feel like anything.

"I-" Mountainstar cleared her throat. "I don't see you as a failure and I never have, Mothflower." She looked to Antwhisker, Gingersky

and Yewtail before returning back to the medicine cat. "But I see that I can't change your mind. I wish you all luck in your travels, we will find a way to manage without you." Mountainstar wasn't even convinced in her own words, and she didn't think anyone else around her was either.

Mountainstar couldn't act as a leader any longer. She turned away from the cats leaving their Clan and walked to her den, a storm brewing inside of her heart ready to break through any moment. She climbed into her den and nearly collapsed in her nest as she felt a severe panic attack grip her entire body.

I failed. I failed them, I failed Mothflower, I failed them all. I couldn't help my Clanmates enough, I couldn't make them happy enough and now we just three warriors and our medicine cat in the dead of leaf-bare. She desperately tried to breathe and calm herself, but each breath felt like a fight.

"Mountainstar--" She heard the voice of Nettleheart behind her, but she could barely focus on it. "Mountainstar this isn't your fault."
"How is not my fault?" Mountainstar raised her voice, she wasn't trying to yell at Nettleheart but she could no longer control her emotions.
"Because you can't change who they are!" Nettleheart raised her voice in response. "They just weren't meant to be warriors! They aren't cut out for it, and that's not your fault. It's only three warriors, we still have plenty who are loyal to you and their Clan."

"We only had one medicine cat--"

"Mothflower has been a neurotic mess since she got here. I'm sorry but Mothflower should never have been chosen to be our medicine cat. She has no confidence in our skills and without the help of an outside medicine cat Sorrelfern might not even be here. You believe in StarClan so much so believe in them now. They gave us Mothflower they'll give us a real medicine cat who can take care of us."

Mountainstar listened intently to Nettleheart's words, looking at the deputy with pleading eyes. "I just don't know what to do."

"You need to get out there and be a leader." Nettleheart stepped closer to her. "You need to get out there and restore our remaining warrior's faith in you and in StarClan. They need you right now and you need them. They need to see you as a strong leader and you need to seem them united."

Mountainstar stood up, she still felt guilt and anxiety clawing at her heart, but she knew Nettleheart was right. She closed her eyes and took a few deep breaths. "Thank you, Nettleheart. I know you're right."

Nettleheart stepped forward, touching her muzzle to Mountainstar's. "Then go be a leader." Her voice dropped to just above a whisper.

Mountainstar held there for a just a few moments before stepping back and going out to face her Clan. She stood on the ledge above the Clan who all looked confused and nervous, she could see that the four cats had already left. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather for a Clan meeting!" She did her best to muster her confidence for her Clan.

She looked over her shoulder briefly to see Nettleheart stepping out and standing at the entrance of her den. She took a deep breath before turning to face her Clan who all looked up at her, waiting for answers. "I apologize for walking away like I did. I needed to process my thoughts. I know this is shocking and painful, having four of our warriors and our medicine cat leave on such short notice. It is scary, and I am scared with you." She glanced up towards the sky for a moment, then back to her Clan.

"I know not all of you may believe in StarClan, and that's fine. I ask that you believe in *me,* your leader. We all worked hard together to establish the Clan and I am not about to let it fall. We will find a new medicine cat, we will not only survive this leaf-bare, but we will thrive. We worked hard to get to this far and I am not about to let us fail. In less than two moons we will welcome the first kits born into MountainClan." She looked at Riverstep who still seemed distraught. "And while Antwhisker may have left, all of MountainClan will work together to raise and protect those kits." Riverstep's eyes flashed with gratitude. "MountainClan is unlike any Clan within these mountains, and we will not fail. I won't let us, but

I need your support. I need the support of my Clanmates, the ones who made this journey with me. I would not be here without all of you at my side."
"We're with you, Mountainstar." Fireclaw stood up.

"We're not going anywhere." Sorrelfern added.

"We're MountainClan warriors!" Mossypaw chimed in and the rest of the MountainClan cats followed. None of them looked uncertain, they all confidence and courage deep in their eyes. Mountainstar felt their pride flowing into her. *I am Mountainstar, leader of MountainClan and these are my warriors.* She looked back over at Nettleheart who gave her a proud nod. *I am not going to let them down again.*

Chapter 23

"Breathe in." Pebblestep instructed, and Owlpaw did as she asked. Her breathing was a bit rough and her throat felt scratchy, but she had improved quite a bit in the last seven days by resting constantly and taking all the herbs both medicine cats threw at her and she had shown a lot of improvement. "Breath out." Owlpaw let out a breath, while not perfect, she exhaled smoothly.

"Alright," Pebblestep stook a step back and looked Owlpaw up and down. "You can come with us to the Spirit Garden tonight, but you have to take it easy."

Owlpaw perked up her head. "Thank you so much, Pebblestep!" Owlpaw waved her tail happily, her paws twitching with excitement but she managed to contain herself. She was very excited to go the Spirit Garden for multiple reasons. She was excited to see Mothflower and ask how things were in MountainClan as well hopefully speaking with Mosscloud about the horrible vision she had been given.

She had adjusted more to it, but she still felt the unease constantly on her shoulders. She checked the moon every night to make sure it wasn't red like in her nightmare. *I need answers, and I hope that Mosscloud will provide them.*

Owlpaw worked with Honeyfrost and Pebblestep for the remainder of the daylight hours, making sure that Petalbreeze and her kits, as well as making sure the elders were well taken of. They made sure everything was taken care of before setting out as the sun began to set.

Owlpaw followed behind Honeyfrost and Pebblestep as they left camp. As the sun fell slowly behind the mountains, the air became more and more freezing. Owlpaw fluffed out her coat, attempting to stay warm as the freezing air bit at their ears and noses. The three medicine cats walked close together, heading towards the river where they would meet up with Oneflight and Mothflower.

They tried their best to hurry through the cold evening, and made good time to the river. Just as they approached, Owlpaw spotted Oneflight's pale gray tabby fur across the more land and he quickly hopped over the river, approaching them. Owlpaw couldn't help but notice that Mothflower wasn't with him like she usually was.

"Where's Mothflower?" Owlpaw questioned.

"I'm not sure." Oneflight replied. "I tried waiting for her like I usually do but she must be running late, it was too cold to wait for her."

Owlpaw tensed up slightly, Mothflower had never been late before. Even if she had only been a medicine cat for a short while. "I'm sure she's fine, Owlpaw." Honeyfrost told Owlpaw, presumably noticing how anxious she had become.

"We should get on the move," Pebblestep suggested. "Mothflower knows her way to the Spirit Garden and I don't want us to get sick standing out here in the freezing cold."

Owlpaw hesitated for a moment, she wanted to wait for Mothflower, to make sure that everything was okay. However, the other three medicine cats clearly didn't agree so Owlpaw didn't have much of a choice. She followed the three older medicine cats and crossed into the gathering hollow where they would meet up with Roseheart and Blackstorm. *Maybe Mothflower is with Roseheart instead of Oneflight this time.* Owlpaw thought hopefully, and continued following through the snow.

They neared the end of the gathering hollow and Owlpaw spotted Roseheart and Blackstorm standing together, still no Mothflower. Owlpaw's anxiety grew, she wished she could go check on Mothflower, but she just had to have faith that the MountainClan medicine cat was okay, and something important came up in MountainClan. *I hope they don't have any sickness.* Owlpaw felt her tail twitch.

"Where's Mothflower?" Roseheart questioned, looking over the other medicine cats.

"Not sure." Honeyfrost responded. "She's either running late or something is preventing her from leaving. Sickness, maybe."

"She did have an injured warrior not long ago," Oneflight spoke up. "Mountainstar and one of her warriors came to me to see if I could help with the infection. When I left she seemed to be well taken care of."

"Who was injured?" Owlpaw questioned instantly, suddenly worried about the state of the MountainClan warriors.

"I believe her name was...." Oneflight thought for a moment. "I believe it was Sorrelfern."

Sorrelfern was one of the former kittypets, she was a very kind she-cat. "What happened to her?"

"Some twoleg rubbish cut her leg, but like I said she was doing well by the time I left."

"Why are we so focused on what's going on in MountainClan." Blackstorm spoke up, annoying lining his mew. "I'd be fine with it if it wasn't freezing outside."

"It's normal to be concerned about the other Clans," Oneflight responded and Owlpaw noticed him and Blackstorm meeting eyes, and a very notable sense of tension between the two cats.

"I will leave without the rest of you, I'm not gonna freeze my paws off for this."

"Calm down, Blackstorm." Roseheart said. "We're going, we're going. Whatever is going on with Mothflower and MountainClan I'm sure they're fine. She very well could catch up with us."

Owlpaw still didn't feel convinced, but there was nothing she could do. She bunched up with the other medicine cats and they started in the last leg of the journey to the Spirit Garden. During the entire walk, Owlpaw's mind was somewhere else as she continuously worried about Mothflower. *Please let her be okay.* Owlpaw said over and over.

At long last, the group of medicine cats climbed the long stone path up to the Spirit Garden and ventured inside. Despite the freezing air outside the garden, it was much warmer inside and the flowers still bright and vibrant. The other medicine cats didn't waste much time laying down and getting comfortable within the Spirit Garden. Owlpaw sat down, but looked over her shoulder several times in hopes of seeing Mothflower but to no avail. She let out a sigh and layed down, curling up and closing her eyes. She breathed in the calming scent of the flowers relaxing her entire body until she fell into a peaceful slumber.

When Owlpaw opened her eyes she was back in the Spirit Garden, but the other medicine cats were gone. She sat up and looked around, she caught the scent of another cat flowing down from the entrance of the Spirit Garden. She stepped out of the den and saw Mosscloud sitting in front of the entrance on a nearby ledge, overlooking the territories below. Owlpaw quickly hurried out of the Spirit Garden and trotted over to Mosscloud.

"I know how terrible the cold seasons can be," Mosscloud mewed. "But it always looks so beautiful covered in snow, though I think that's the MoonClan cat in me." She glanced over at Owlpaw. "I'm sure you have a lot of questions."

Owlpaw had been wanting to ask Mosscloud all of her questions, but the first one seemed to leave her mouth without her thinking. "Where is Mothflower? Is she okay?"

Mosscloud's eyes shifted down for just a moment and she let out a sigh, before turning her head towards the territories once again. "Mothflower is safe, or I believe she is. She has left MountainClan."

Owlpaw's eyes widened. "She *left?* Where did she go? And why? Did StarClan send her somewhere?"

Mosscloud shook her head. "Mothflower has given up on her position of medicine cat and left MountainClan for good. I used to be able to see the entire sky outside of StarClan, but now she is beyond my view."

Owlpaw was filled with disbelief. "How could Mothflower just

leave? How could she just turn her back on MountainClan! Especially during leaf-bare!"

"I don't know why, I wish I did but I don't." Mosscloud sighed. "I knew she was struggling, but when I tried to visit her in her dreams I couldn't reach her. She shut herself off to StarClan and I couldn't reach her, I don't know if this was her intention or she just lost her faith in both us and herself."

"What do we do?" Owlpaw questioned. "MountainClan *needs* a medicine cat."

Mosscloud looked back at Owlpaw, their gazes meeting. "The answers about MountainClan will come to you soon, StarClan will guide you to the new medicine cat within time. " Owlpaw felt frustration burn in her heart. *Why can't StarClan ever just tell me what to do?* "I'm sure you have more questions, and we don't have all night."

"Right..." Owlpaw sighed, she would have to figure something else about MountainClan later on, she had more questions to ask. "I want to talk about the horrible vision you showed me about the blood moon, and the prophecy."

"I showed the vision for a reason," Mosscloud responded. "There is tension brewing between the Clans, you may not be able to see it but it is there and if not stopped, the Clans could tear themselves apart."

"How am I supposed to stop this?" Owlpaw questioned, feeling just as hopeless as she did the night she received the vision. "I'm only one medicine cat, I don't even have my full medicine cat name yet. I've already risked my life several times trying build MountainClan, what more do I have to give? Why is it only me?" Owlpaw's voice became increasingly more panicked, and pained. "I just want to enjoy my life as a medicine cat and it feels like I can't even do that without StarClan constantly demanding I do something!"

Mosscloud's eyes shadowed with sadness and sympathy. "I'm sorry it has to be you, Owlpaw." She ducked her head. "I know what it's like to bear the weight of StarClan's responsibility. My destiny was to

die at a young age and to be trapped outside of the skies of my ancestors, trapped away from my family and friends. This was my destiny to help cats outside the Clans as well as helping you to build MountainClan."
Owlpaw flattened her ears. "Maybe I shouldn't complain so much."

Mosscloud rested her tail on Owlpaw's shoulder. "Your feelings are valid, Owlpaw. Sometimes it is unfair, it's unfair that such young cats are chosen to be the bearer of these prophecies and missions, but we do them because we have to do, because it's for the greater good of the Clans." She let out a sigh. "You are never alone, Owlpaw. I will be right here by your side as we work together cause not even I truly know how to stop this war, but we will work together."

Owlpaw didn't respond, but she looked out over the territories. She could see the freshly fallen, sparkling snow across the grass and trees. *She was right, it is beautiful.* Owlpaw could feel her dream weakening as her body started to wake up.

"It's time for you to wake up, Owlpaw." Mosscloud mewed. "But remember what I said, you are never alone." Owlpaw held onto her words as best she could as the medicine cat and the world around them faded away.

Chapter 24

Owlpaw opened her eyes and she was back in the Spirit Garden with the other medicine cats who were waking up as well. She didn't even bother checking for Mothflower cause now she knew the truth. *Mothflower is gone*.

Owlpaw looked around at the other medicine cats, she wondered if she should tell them all right away, but she decided against it. *I'll teel Honeyfrost and Pebblestep once we're alone, and then I'll go to MountainClan camp and help them prepare herbs, then I'll try and figure out what to do and hope StarClan sends me a sign on who the next medicine cat of MountainClan should be.*

Owlpaw remained silent as the other medicine cats gathered and they headed out of the Spirit Garden and made the long journey back to their territories. Blackstorm remained distant from the other medicine cats as usual, but she couldn't help but notice Oneflight did the same. *I wonder what is going on with them?* Blackstorm was always distant, but Oneflight never was. He was always friendly with the other medicine cats but now he seemed incredibly distant. Owlpaw couldn't focus too much on him, though. She had much bigger issues to worry about.

The walk through the freezing cold air was long, Blackstorm and Roseheart broke off from the group to go home quickly and the reaming three reached the river border just before the sun started to rise. They bid farewell to Oneflight and the SunClan cat medicine cats stepped into their own territory.

Owlpaw felt exhausted and her lungs were starting to ache, but she couldn't keep it hidden any longer. "Mothflower left MountainClan."

Both Honeyfrost and Pebblestep came to a stop and turned to look at Owlpaw. "She left? What do you mean?"
"Mosscloud told me that Mothflower left, and isn't coming back. She couldn't handle being a medicine cat and she left."

Concern filled Honeyfrost's eyes and she looked at Owlpaw for a long moment. "Wasn't she chosen by StarClan?"

Owlpaw nodded. "StarClan guided me to her and she seemed to be doing well when I left her and Mosscloud was training her as well, but she got overwhelmed." Owlpaw dropped her head. "Maybe I didn't train her well enough."
"Owlpaw you weren't even a medicine cat when you started training her, you gave her what little knowledge you had and Mosscloud did the rest." Pebblestep explained. " If Mothflower couldn't handle being a medicine cat then that's on her, not you."

"I need to do something." Owlpaw replied frantically.
"MountainClan needs to be prepared for sickness and injuries, they can't get by without herbs."

Pebblestep sighed. "I know you're worried about them Owlpaw, but MountainClan is not your responsibility, you--"

"Yes they are!" Owlpaw cried. "I helped build them, I know they're not my Clan but I *need* to help them!"

Pebblestep was silent for a moment before letting out a defeated sigh. "What exactly do you want to do to help them?"

Owlpaw was a little surprised that she was asking, she honestly figured it would be more a fight. "I want to go to MountainClan camp and gather herbs for illness and teach them how to best use them for illness until StarClan sends me a sign for the next MountainClan medicine cat like Mosscloud said they would."

"Get some rest tonight, sleep and get your energy. Then I will allow you to travel to MountainClan territory and help them prepare for illness. You can even provide them some of our herbs that we have excess of. You may stay the night if you need to and make sure they are prepared. If that will help you feel better about MountainClan then I will allow it." Pebblestep turned to Honeyfrost who gave an approving nod.

"Thank you both." Owlpaw dipped her head and breathed out a sigh of relief. The three medicine cats continued heading home, finally

reaching camp and settling into their nests to get sleep and keep warm.

Owlpaw felt exhausted both emotionally and physically from the long journey, but it didn't take her long to fall asleep as she thought about which herbs to take to MountainClan tomorrow.

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Owlpaw approached the MountainClan border with a bundle of herbs in her mouth. She had gotten plenty of rest and gathered some herbs for MountainClan so they would helpfully be prepared. She had gathered tansy, feverfew, chickweed, coltsfoot and a little bit of catmint in case of an emergency. She didn't want to take too much away from her own Clan, but Pebblestep allowed her to bring a small amount.

She had traveled through the gathering hollow territory to avoid having to cross as many rivers in MoonClan territory, it was a bit longer but she wouldn't get her pelt wet. She carefully crossed into MountainClan territory and started towards the camp. She hadn't been here since the Clan first arrived in the mountains, she forgot how pretty MountainClan's territory was, it almost felt familiar despite how little time she had spent here.

Mountainstar had promised her that she was always welcome to visit, so Owlpaw confidently padded her way towards the camp. She was nearly there when she caught the scent of MountainClan cats. "Stay there!" A voice called and she froze in place, but she didn't feel threatened. She stood where she was and watched as a MountainClan patrol stepped into view. It was led by Nettleheart and had Spiderstorm and Hazelspring. *That's a very small patrol.* Owlpaw noticed.

"Oh, it's you Owlpaw" Nettleheart almost seemed relived to see her. "What are you doing here?"

Owlpaw set the herb bundle down. "I know that Mothflower left, and I am here to help as best I can." Nettleheart exchanged a glance with Spiderstorm.

"We appreciate that," Nettleheart dipped her head. "We'll take you to our camp and you can see Mountainstar." Owlpaw nodded and followed the small MountainClan patrol as they led her to the camp. She climbed the stone path and entered the camp.

She looked around the camp and was happy to see that the Clan camp looked well lived in. Despite the cold weather outside, MountainClan cats were conversing outside and they all looked quite happy.

"Owlpaw!" She heard a happy cry and turned her head to see Sparrowpaw and Finchpaw running up to her. She was shocked to see just how big the apprentices had grown. She was smaller than the normal apprentice, but she was a few moons older than them and yet they were nearly the same size as her. "You're back! We missed you!"

"I missed you too." Owlpaw purred and noticed that most of the Clan's attention had been grabbed as well. They all gave Owlpaw fond and welcome looks. She almost felt at home here. *I'm so happy all the warriors feel happy here.* She thought happily. "I'm here to see Mountainstar and to help you all out a bit."

"We welcome you, Owlpaw." She heard the voice of Mountainstar and turned towards the leaders den where she saw the leader standing. She looked proud, but Owlpaw could also see that there was an incredible amount of stress weighing on her shoulders. Owlpaw set her herb bundle down again and approached Mountainstar.

"It's good to see you." Owlpaw said happily. "I know about Mothflower and I'm here to help as best I can."

"Thank you, Owlpaw." Mountainstar dipped her head.

"I have some herbs here, I can teach you their basic uses so you can help your Clanmates in case they get sick." Owlpaw explained.

"Let's go to the medicine cat den, we can talk more there." Mountainstar suggested and Owlpaw picked up her bundle, following her to the medicine cat den. When they stepped inside

Owlpaw was surprised at how big it was, she hadn't seen it since they first got here but she forgot how large it was.

She looked around and noticed several nests, most of which were unkempt and hadn't been slept in quite a while. She looked towards the herb store and saw that Mothflower had left what she had, but it was far from full or organized. She saw that some of the herbs were dying and rotting away. *How long has she been struggling?*

"When did Mothflower leave?" Owlpaw questioned as she set down the herbs and started cleaning and organizing Mothflower's herbs.

"About three days ago, and it wasn't just her." Owlpaw turned around to face her in surprise. "Antwhisker, Gingersky and Yewtail left as well." She sighed, Owlpaw could see guilt hidden in her golden eyes. "And Flintfoot left earlier this moon after him and I got into an argument."

"It's not your fault, Mountainstar." Owlpaw assured the leader. "Some cats just aren't cut out for the life of a warrior," She looked around at the poorly kept medicine cat den. "Or medicine cat."

She swept up some herbs with her tail and turned to Mountainstar. "I have permission to stay here overnight if needed. I will help stock up your herb store and teach you how to treat sickness if it arises. Mosscloud told me she would send a sign leading me to a new medicine cat when the time is right, hopefully this training will last long enough."

Mountainstar nodded. "I appreciate your help Owlpaw, and I hope that StarClan chooses the right medicine cat this time."

Owlpaw sighed and looked at Mothflower's den. "I hope so too."

Chapter 25

"Let all cats old enough to catch their prey gather for a Clan meeting!" Slatepaw lifted his head, slightly annoyed that he would have to leave his warm nest in the apprentice den to attend some Clan meeting. He let out a groan as he rose to his paws and poked his head outside of the den. He saw that Riverstar had called the meeting and the Clan was starting to gather.

Slatepaw didn't know what this meeting was about, and since it wasn't his warrior ceremony he didn't particularly care, but he knew he was required to attend. Slatepaw stepped out of the apprentice den and gathered with the rest of Clan, sitting slightly isolated from everyone else.

He spotted Otterpaw and his siblings sitting close together, talking and being obnoxious about what they thought the meeting might be about. Slatepaw flicked his tail in annoyance but kept his gaze focused on Riverstar who sat tall with Stormheart at her side.

When the Clan had finally all gathered, the AshClan leader began. "I'm sure you are all aware of the tensions we've had with MoonClan in the past few moons." Slatepaw hadn't been aware of the issues until he returned, where he was then told that MoonClan cats had been often picking fights and starting arguments at gatherings, and when Riverstar had visited Shadowstar in their camp, he had only been disrespectful and rude to the warriors, refusing to take accountability for his warriors.

Slatepaw had been nearby when he saw one of the MoonClan apprentices bump into Harewhisker. Harewhisker had told the three apprentices to act more mature and to stop playing around and they responded with nothing but attitude and disrespect towards an older warrior.

Harewhisker rightfully called them out on the matter when Brokenclaw, one of the apprentice's mentor snapped at Harewhisker telling him not to speak to MoonClan apprentices that way.

Slatepaw had watched the entire exchange take place with Brokenclaw and Harewhisker getting into a rather heartened argument that resulted in Brokenclaw unsheathed it claws.

It wasn't stopped until Stormheart stepped in and separated the two toms. From what Slatepaw had been told about the visit to MoonClan's camp, Shadowstar had refused to take any of the blame for the actions of his apprentices and warrior even though MoonClan's apprentice had been acting foolishly and Brokenclaw was the one to show his claws in the first place.

Slatepaw had always been lead to believe that MoonClan cats were peaceful, but clearly they were nothing but a bunch of pretentious warriors who claimed to be peaceful to get away with being disrespectful of the other Clans.

"While we don't share a border with MoonClan, I've been sending patrols to their river border just to make certain that MoonClan isn't going to attempt anything and sure enough Stormheart's patrol scented strong MoonClan scent markers *outside* of their dedicated territory. I instructed the next patrol to cover the scent line. I know a challenge when I see one, and if Shadowstar thinks that AshClan will back down from a challenge they are sorely mistaken."

Slatepaw stared at the AshClan leader, it was clear to any AshClan cat that MoonClan *was* pushing them, it was as a clear as day. "What do you plan to do, Riverstar?" The voice came from Hailfeather.

"I have taken time to weigh my options," Riverstar responded. "And I did not consider them alone. I have been discussing the situation with not only Stormheart, but my senior warriors as well including Harewhisker, Silvermoon, Nightheart and Lilyclaw as well as our medicine cat so I could make the decision that benefits our Clan the most." Every AshClan warrior waited with baited breath. "And together we came to the conclusion that we will lead an attack on MoonClan."

Slatepaw held his head high, his claws flexing into the stone floor beneath his paws. *At long last, a fight. What warriors were truly meant to do.* "As I promised the warriors I have spoke to, this battle will

not be one to kill. We are not here to kill any MoonClan warriors. We will attack their warriors, leave them wounded and retreat. I will be sure to send a message directly to Shadowstar, so he understands that AshClan will not be taken advantage of, AshClan will not be threatened, AshClan will not be disrespected without consequence."

AshClan cats began to raise their voices in support, cheering on their leader. Slatepaw couldn't help but join in. *This is the life I was meant to live, that of a warrior. Fighting to defend my Clan's honor and demanding respect. This is what an AshClan warrior is meant to do.*

"At Blackstorm's suggestion," Riverstar continued. "We will start this fight in three days. We will attack before sunset as MoonClan will have the advantage at night and many of their warriors sleep during the day for their nightly patrols. This will allow Blackstorm to prepare herbs for wounds. He will be staying near the river border in the gathering hollow to treat any wounds Otterpaw and Russetpaw will be assisting him directly. Slatepaw and Larchpaw will both involved in the fight." Slatepaw knew why she chose Larchpaw, he was by far the strongest and most skilled of his siblings. "While Blackstorm is preparing herbs, the rest of us will be refining our training skills and being prepared to fight a MoonClan warrior. They are quick, smart and they will have the advantage of their own territory, but no matter the advantage, AshClan will always remain superior."

The AshClan cats cheered again and Riverstar dismissed the meeting as Stormheart began organizing training sessions, but Slatepaw noticed Leafdawn directly approaching him. "I would like to talk to you."
"What is it?" Slatepaw questioned.

"I want you working directly with Larchpaw to sharpen his battle skills further, and during this preparation time and during the battle I want you following and respecting every order given to you whether its from me or any other warrior." Slatepaw narrowed his eyes, holding Leafdawn's gaze intently. "If you can do that, then I promise the moment we return from this battle I will have Riverstar make you a warrior." *About time.* Slatepaw thought, but kept his mouth shut. "I will keep my promise if you promise to follow any

orders given to you."

"I promise." Slatepaw replied, and as annoying as it was, he intended to keep it. "You won't hear a single complaint about me."

"I'll hold you to it." Leafdawn gave him a stern nod. "Now get to work, we have a battle to win."

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Slatepaw fixed his gaze on the other side of the river into MoonClan territory. It was past sunhigh, nearing sunset, From what he had been told, a lot of MoonClan cats would be sleeping at this point to prepare for their nightly duties.. *This will be easy.* Slatepaw told himself, flexing his claws in the near frozen earth beneath his paws.

"Remember our plan of attack." Riverstar announced. "My patrol will attack first, we will be scattered to make our numbers look smaller. Then Stormheart's patrol will come in from behind the camp and attack the cats just waking from their dens."

The AshClan cats agreed and began to break into their respective patrols. Slatepaw was on the second patrol with Stormheart, Leafdawn and others. He stood next to Leafdawn and his sister Mistflight who looked slightly nervous. "It will be alright," Slatepaw spoke up to her. "AshClan cats don't lose."

Mistflight looked at him gratefully. He had gotten over the fact that both of his sisters became warriors before him, it wasn't their fault after all and he still had to be a brother to them. "We will head out now." Riverstar looked at Stormheart. "Don't fall too far behind if we want this to go smoothly."

"Yes, Riverstar." Stormheart nodded his head. "We will follow closely behind you."

"Good." Riverstar looked over her Clan once more. "Remember, we are fighting to make a point, not to kill. Once I make my point to Shadowstar we will leave, we are not retreating and it will not be a loss, but a victory."

Without saying much else, Riverstar turned and led her own patrol

across the river into the moorlands of MoonClan territory. Slatepaw stood still, waiting patiently to start this battle. However, internally he was dying to begin. His claws wanted nothing more than to fight, he hadn't had a fight since the rouges in Mountainstar's home and they had barely been a threat. *Fighting real warriors.* He had been waiting his entire life for this moment.

AshClan hadn't been in a fight against real warriors since the fight against SunClan where Slatepaw's father lost his life. *I'll fight this battle for him.* Slatepaw vowed. *To make him proud of the warrior I am going to become, no-- to make him proud of the warrior I am.* Slatepaw watched the tails of Riverstar's patrol as they eventually vanished over over the rolling hills of the moorland.

"Let's go." Stormheart announced. "They'll be at camp soon and we don't want to risk running into a patrol." The deputy lead the rest of AshClan to the river where they crossed using a large log that had been fixed over the river by Stormheart, Dustfall and Harewhisker to give them safe crossing without freezing to death in the river.

Slatepaw stayed by his mentor as they crossed the river and ventured into the moorland. Slatepaw caught the scent of the MoonClan dawn patrol, but they had long passed. *There shouldn't be another patrol for a while yet.* He noted and continued to follow.

Stormheart led his patrol away from the direction that Riverstar had gone, taking them in a wider path towards MoonClan camp so they could attack from behind. The walk was long, but within good time, Slatepaw spotted MoonClan camp in the distance. He could also see Riverstar and her patrol in the distance.

Stormheart continued forward with the AshClan cats behind him, they followed closely and made their way behind the camp. "Wait here." Stormheart said quietly and Slatepaw lowered his body to the snowy ground. He kept his amber eyes peeled on MoonClan camp not too far from where they were.

In an instant, Riverstar's patrol rushed into the camp with a chorus of battle cries and the fight began as AshClan and MoonClan warriors were tangled into a battle. "Wait." Stormheart called, raising his tail as he watched.

Slatepaw shifted his gaze back and forth between Stormheart and the battle below. Slatepaw spotted dazed and confused warriors rushing from their dens as the fight continued. "Now!" Stormheart let out a battle cry and began his charge into battle.

Feeling his adrenaline quickly ignite, Slatepaw followed after. His large paws pounding against the frozen ground. Each warrior throwing up massive flurries of snow as they descended upon MoonClan camp.

The second patrol reached the Clan within moments and Slatepaw wasted no time. He set his sights on a speckled brown and white tom be believed was named Ferretpelt, but in this moment it didn't matter. Slatepaw leapt forward, his claws fully extended as he landed on Ferretpelt's back, sinking his claws into his shoulders and throwing him down to the side.

Slatepaw jumped off and slashed his claws across Ferretpelt's fur, sending the warrior's blood spraying across the snow while he cried out in pain. *This is too easy.* Slatepaw thought confidently. Ferretpelt struggled to get to his paws and as soon as he did, Slatepaw attacked again, this time going lower.

He drove his head directly into Ferretpelt's chest, the warrior let out a harsh breath as he fell backwards, onto his back. Slatepaw saw his chance and his claws raked across Ferretpelt's soft belly, blood pooling in the wake of his claws.

"Stop!" A familiar voice cried and Slatepaw whipped around to see Leopardpaw running towards him, anger in her eyes. Her movement was easy to predict and Slatepaw easily slipped out of the direction of her attack. He countered by lunging forward and slashing at her chest. His claws connected with the fur on her chest and watched as her blood splattered the ground.

"You fight just as bad as you did in the mountains." Slatepaw taunted her.

Leopardpaw flattened her ears and hissed, baring her teeth at Slatepaw. "You are a heartless cat, and I won't let you kill my Clanmates!" Leopardpaw attacked again and while her attack was

predictable, she was incredibly quick. Slatepaw attempted to dodge her attack but he heavily underestimated her speed.

She jumped onto his shoulders and he felt her claws sinking in as she attempted to throw him off balance. *Predictable.* Slatepaw willingly lessened his stability and just as Leopardpaw thought she had control, Slatepaw flipped his body over and landed backwards, crushing Leopardpaw beneath his weigh.

She let out a shrill squeak of pain and Slatepaw quickly flipped over onto his paws. Leopardpaw was stuck on her back, out of breath and dazed. Slatepaw raised his paw, intending to do exactly what he did to Ferretpelt.

Before he could move, a new weight slammed into Slatepaw's body and threw him to the side. He landed roughly on his shoulder and took a few seconds to recover and get back on his paws. He found himself facing another MoonClan apprentice, this one named Shellpaw. Shellpaw was standing beside Leopardpaw who had gotten back up, and despite the wound on her chest was facing Slatepaw head on.

"Two on one." Slatepaw spat. "Just what I would expect from cowardly MoonClan cats." *I'm not scared of them.* Slatepaw declared and rushed forward, going straight for Shellpaw. He lunged forward, his body colliding with Shellpaw's and he sank his teeth into Shellpaw's shoulder, clawing his flank with his forepaws.

He felt his own pelt ripping as Shellpaw reached around and clawed from his shoulder to half-way down his foreleg. He bit down harder, refusing to give in as he shifted his weight to overpower Shellpaw.

However, he felt another weight on his back as Leopardpaw jumped onto his back, slashing down his spine. The pain burned across Slatepaw's entire body and he had no choice but to let go. The only thing he could taste was Shellpaw's blood, but he whipped around and twisted his body to reach up and strike at Leopardpaw.

His claws connected with her foreleg and he ripped down despite the awkward angle. She stumbled off and fell to the ground. *Annoying she-cat.* Slatepaw cursed in his mind, he ignored the pain

of his wounds and turned his attention directly to Leopardpaw. *I need her out of my way.* Slatepaw charged forward towards Leopardpaw but felt claws sink into his haunches and pull him backward.

Slatepaw yowled in pain and whipped his head around as Shellpaw dragged him back. He tore away from his grip and spun around to attack him instead. Slatepaw's movements were starting to slow as the pain from all across his body started to overwhelmed his mind and cloud his vision.

This allowed Shellpaw to get the advantage on him and when Slatepaw went into attack, Shellpaw bit down hard on the section of flesh between Slatepaw's shoulder and neck. Shellpaw's bite had an incredible amount of force behind it and Slatepaw yowled in pain as he felt his blood spilling out from around Shellpaw's muzzle.

In desperation, Slatepaw raked his claws down the side of Shellpaw's head, feeling his claws shred through Shellpaw's ears, but the apprentice did not let him go. Slatepaw was losing his strength, energy and momentum from the burning pain of Shellpaw's bite. In one last effort, Slatepaw reached below Shellpaw and slashed his claws at Shellpaw's belly, feeling warm blood cover his paw.

Shellpaw lost strength in his bite for just long enough for Slatepaw to shove him away. Slatepaw broke free from Shellpaw, but stumbled backwards and fell onto his side. His breathing was heavy as he could feel his blood pooling in the snow beneath him. "Slatepaw!" He heard the cry of his mentor and soon she appeared into view, nudging him to his paws.

Slatepaw leaned against Leafdawn, the bite wound above his leg making it near impossible for him to stand on it. "Come, on, we need to get you to Blackstorm."

""No--" Slatepaw spat, he refused to give up but his vision was starting to blur and the pain was making him unstable.

"You're done, Slatepaw." Leafdawn commanded. "You've served your Clan, and you've earned your warrior name. Now come with me."

Slatepaw knew he couldn't continue in this state, he had no choice but to turn and leave. *I did what I needed to do.* He let Leafdawn guide him out of MoonClan camp and towards the river.

The entire walk was a blur, the pain taking over his body and the freezing cold air wasn't helping. He could feel his heart pounding painfully within his chest, dragging his injured side against his mentor as he left a trail of blood behind him.

After a long walk, Leafdawn helped Slatepaw across the river and he collapsed next to Blackstorm. He could hear the medicine cat and his mentor talking, but couldn't make our their words. His eyes focused on the starry sky above. *I did my job. I fought for my Clan.* He told himself. *And I will be the greatest warrior AshClan has ever seen.* With his final thought, Slatepaw felt himself slip into unconsciousness

Chapter 26

"So I start by giving them tansy if they develop a cough and isolate them in the medicine cat den. If it gets worse then I give them chickweed and my last resort should be to give them the catmint." Mountainstar recited to Owlpaw, pointing to each herb as she named it.

"Correct." Owlpaw nodded. "I also brought coltsfoot just in case, which can also ease coughing and feverfew will help reduce a fever if it arises."

"Understood." Mountainstar nodded.

"You learned this all very quickly." Owlpaw praised the leader. "Though I wish you didn't have to take on the roll of both leader *and* medicine cat." She said with a sigh as she carefully organized the herbs in a way that would be easy for Mountainstar to recognize.

"I know but I promise to take care of my Clan. They are busy hunting for our Clan, so I figured the least I could do was take on this responsibility until StarClan sends a new medicine cat. Which I hope is soon."

"Me too." Owlpaw sighed. "I will let you know as soon as I know anything."

"Of course." Mountainstar nodded, but something was still clearly troubling her. "What should I do about Riverstep? I'm not sure I could handle delivering kits."

When Owlpaw had gotten there Mountainstar explained that Riverstep had been expecting Antwhisker's kits, another thing they needed a medicine cat for. "She's still not due for at least a moon and a half. When it gets closer to that time I will ask Pebblestep and Honeyfrost to teach me the process and let me come here to stay, if

we haven't found a medicine cat yet. If she somehow starts kitting before then, then have a warrior run to MoonClan camp to ask Oneflight for help. When I leave I plan on stopping by to let him know of the situation."

"Thank you, Owlpaw." Mountainstar dipped her head. "We are very appreciative of your help. I just hope StarClan hurries in sending us a new medicine cat, we can't have you being a medicine cat for two Clans at the same time."

"I hope so too." Owlpaw replied. "But I am happy to help." She made sure to look over the herbs. "But I think it's time for me to go back to SunClan, I would like to get back before sunset."

"Of course." Mountainstar nodded, but Owlpaw could see sadness in her eyes and it was the same sadness that Owlpaw felt internally. "Thank you again, I hope I can do enough to keep my Clanmates healthy."

"I believe in you, Mountainstar. Oneflight and Roseheart are always there to help as well." Owlpaw responded and Mountainstar nodded her head. The two she-cats stepped out of the den and into the open camp. The MountainClan cats were busy at work, keeping their paws busy. Owlpaw had enjoyed the day she spent in MountainClan, it reminded her of the journey and how comfortable and happy she had felt with the MountainClan cats.

"They all seem happy." Owlpaw said, looking over the warriors.

"They do." Mountainstar replied. "I still wish I could've done something for the five cats I lost."

Owlpaw shook her head. "There's nothing you can do about it now, soon Riverstep will give birth and MountainClan will have more warriors, and you will continue to grow, just as the other four Clans do."

"Thank you for your words of encouragement." Mountainstar took a deep breath, touching her tail to Owlpaw's shoulders. "You should get on the move before it gets late and cold."

"I know." Owlpaw looked up at the Clan leader. "Don't hesitate to ask for help if you need it."

"Of course." Mountainstar dipped her head. "Travel safely, Owlpaw."

Owlpaw said goodbye to many of the MountainClan warriors who had been incredibly kind to her on her visit. She had enjoyed training Mountainstar on the usage of herbs, and she felt like she had a purpose within the MountainClan camp, but she knew she couldn't stay forever.

After saying her goodbyes, Owlpaw reluctantly turned her back on the MountainClan camp. *Please keep them safe.* Owlpaw silently prayed to StarClan. *And send me a sign soon, they can't go without a medicine cat for long.* She took one final look at the MountainClan camp and went on her way.

She padded through the snowy forest towards MoonClan territory. During her entire walk to the river she couldn't help but worry about MountainClan. She had asked around and no one had reported any signs of illness or coughing, but she couldn't help but feel like it was only a matter of time. *Just give them a medicine cat before then.* She pleaded silently.

Mountainstar had informed Owlpaw of a narrow part of the river that she could easily jump across the other side. She followed her directions and found the spot to jump. She winded herself up and leapt across to the other side. She decided to wait here to a patrol, she wanted to show respect to MoonClan and their borders.

She sat down and waited, but no patrol showed up. She wasn't sure how long she sat by the river but she could feel her paws getting painfully cold and her body started to shiver. She sniffed the air, the scent of frost burning her nose but in addition to the scent of MoonClan she caught another scent that caught her off guard. *AshClan. Why do I scent them?*

Unease started to spike in Owlpaw's belly, she rose to her paws ans started venturing towards the MoonClan camp. *Something feels wrong.* She walked quickly across the moorland, trying to keep a steady pace but her panic and speed only increased when she

caught the sharp tang of blood on the air and as she grew even closer to the MoonClan camp, she heard the sounds of cats fighting. *No.* The sounds were the same of the vision Mosscloud had showed her and she began to feel the same sense of fear and panic rise into her.

Owlpaw broke into a sprint towards the camp, her little legs carrying her as fast as they could. She reached the camp at a much faster pace and skidded to a stop, kicking up snow as she viewed the horrors a short distance away. MoonClan was engaged in a violent battle with AshClan, she could see warriors from both Clans bleeding and injured as they fought and tore at each other. She stood frozen in horror, suddenly it felt as if her vision was coming true.

"What are you doing here?" A voice suddenly yelled, getting Owlpaw's attention. She spotted Oneflight standing apart from the battle, his silver paws tinged with blood from healing his Clanmates.

"I-I was visiting MountainClan, what's happening?"

"Riverstar attacked us." Oneflight's eyes were tired and scared. "Come with me, I need your help. I was going to use a warrior but you're even better." He turned but when Owlpaw hesitated he turned to look back at her with pleading eyes. "Owlpaw please!"

She broke out of her panic and nodded, following after Oneflight as they hurried into his den. Inside she saw Ferretpelt lying on his back. His stomach was exposed with deep claw wounds pouring blood. "Keep pressure on his wound with moss while I prepare the herbs and cobwebs."

"Right." Owlpaw listened to his command and rushed to Ferretpelt's body. She grabbed a nearby bundle of moss and pressed it onto the wounds, which instantly stained the moss dark red. She held the pressure firm, just as she had done in the past with Leafdawn and Nettleheart.

She watched as Oneflight worked quickly to craft a poultice. "Move your paws." He commanded as he hurried over to the injured

warrior. Owlpaw removed her paws and the soiled moss, dropping it to the side as Oneflight applied the poultice to his wounds. "Get the cobwebs."

He motioned with his head towards the cobweb he had collection. Owlpaw quickly grabbed a large supply of cobweb and began applying it to the wound while Oneflight helped. Together they got the wound covered and patched up. Oneflight let out a heavy sigh once they finished. "Thank you, Owlpaw and thank StarClan you just so happened to be here at the right time."

"Why is AshClan attacking?" Owlpaw questioned now that Ferretpelt had been treated.

"We've been having issues with them and I suppose she's had enough." Oneflight lashed his tail. *So that's why Blackstorm and Oneflight were acting tense towards each other.*

"Oneflight!" Owlpaw heard the call of a MoonClan warrior and Ebonywing limped into the den, her jet black fur damped with blood as she heavily favored her left foreleg. She looked at Owlpaw with distrust in her eyes. "What are you doing here?"

"She was visiting MountainClan and now she's here helping me." Oneflight said, guiding Ebonywing over to another nest where he began treating her leg. "Owlpaw can I count on you to help me treat anymore wounds that might come in?"

"Of course." Owlpaw nodded and looked out into the camp where the battle raged. She saw plenty of injured AshClan warriors, but she had to hope Blackstorm was nearby and treating them as well. *What am I supposed to do here? Is this the war that I was warned about? How could I have stopped this when it wasn't even in my own Clan!*

Owlpaw turned her head back into the medicine cat den where Oneflight was swiftly treating Ebonywing, she looked to Ferretpelt for just a moment before a rage-filled cry split the air. Owlpaw instantly snapped her head around and Oneflight rushed to the den entrance, nearly knocking her over. Owlpaw stepped out beside him, looking towards the source of the cry and what she saw turned

her blood to ice.

Riverstar stood towards the center of camp, blood covering her muzzle and chest, her blue eyes betrayed shock as she looked down towards a lifeless black body at her paws. Shadowstar lay still on the ground, his yellow eyes opened wide but empty of any life. Beside him stood Violetfur, looking at her leader in horror. *No no no.* Owlpaw stood frozen in place looking at the lifeless body of the MoonClan leader.

"*No!"* Oneflight's wailed, his voice filled with pain and anger. The medicine cat sprinted across the camp towards his father's body.

"You killed him!" Violetfur shouted, her voice trembling with rage. "You killed our leader!"

"I-" Riverstar couldn't seem to speak as she took a step back from Shadowstar's body.

Violetfur let out another rage filled cry, her voice shaking and filled with pain and sorrow. Owlpaw watched as the MoonClan deputy lashed out, raking her claws across Riverstar's face.

Riverstar let out a cry of pain and jumped backwards, Owlpaw saw bloody slash marks across her muzzle and down the side of her cheek. "AshClan!" Riverstar raised her voice after recovering. She looked over the camp for a moment, her eyes briefly meeting with Owlpaw's. Owlpaw flattened her ears and ducked her head. "We're leaving!"

Owlpaw stood in disbelief as Riverstar and her warriors left in an instant, leaving nothing but crimson colored snow in their wake. Oneflight was slumped over by the body of Shadowstar. *Why isn't he healing the wound? Unless...* Realization hit her. *That must have been Shadowstar's last life.*

"Owlpaw of SunClan." Violetfur's spoke, her voice raw from her wailing, making Owlpaw tense up. "What are you doing here?" She weakly turned her gaze to the apprentice, all of MoonClan turned their attention to her as well.

"I-I was visiting MountainClan, I was going to stop by and tell something to Oneflight when I realized that there was battle."

"She helped me with Ferretpelt's wound." Oneflight spoke up.

Violetfur dropped her aggressive stance and dropped her head. "Thank you, Owlpaw." The MoonClan deputy flexed her claws into the snowy moorland. Owlpaw could see the pain written on her face as she looked at her dead leader. After a few moments she raised her head and looked over her Clan. "AshClan has crossed the line, *Riverstar*, has crossed the line. A violent, bloodthirsty leader no better than Echoheart, the very cat we helped her drive out." Owlpaw heard pure, raw rage in her voice. "And now she has claimed the life of our beloved leader." She stepped into the center of the camp. "Her actions will not go unpunished, she *will* regret the choices she has made today." The rage and pain in Owlpaw's voice filled her with fear and uncertainty. "If it's a war that Riverstar wants, then it's a war that she will get."

The word war twisted Owlpaw's heart. *No.* Her head snapped up towards the sky, and as the clouds cleared the now risen moon her heart filled with fear, making Owlpaw feel sick, The moon was red. *No. This is what StarClan warned me about. A war between MoonClan and AshClan.*

Violetfur had noticed the blood moon as well. "And it seems StarClan agrees with us." There was a dark storm brewing in her eyes, after a few moments she turned her attention back to Owlpaw. "Owlpaw we thank you for your help and I encourage you to tell Dawnstar what as happened here, what Riverstar did to our Clan." She looked over her Clanmates. "Swiftheart, Icepool. Escort Owlpaw home safely. We can take care of ourselves from here."

Owlpaw could barely move, she didn't know what to do. She couldn't yell at Violetfur to not wage a war on AshClan, especially not after Riverstar killed their leader. The best she could do right now was tell Dawnstar was happened and hopefully her leader could make a plan to find peace between the two Clans.

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Swiftheart and Icepool escorted Owlpaw to the SunClan border and as soon as she reached it she broke into a sprint towards her camp. It didn't take her long to reach the camp and when she did her Clanmates looked at her shock. The first cat to spot her was Pebblestep who was sharing prey with Cinderflame.

Pebblestep met her gaze and saw the blood staining her paws. "Owlpaw what happened?"

"I need to talk to Dawnstar." Was all Owlpaw said and she sprinted across camp and into the leader's den. Inside Dawnstar was resting and eating prey alone. Both Pebblestep and Cinderflame followed her inside.

"Owlpaw?" Dawnstar quickly stood up and faced Owlpaw. "What's going on? Is that blood--"

"Shadowstar is dead." Owlpaw blurted out.

"What?" Dawnstar mewed in disbelief. "What happened, Owlpaw?"

"I-I" Owlpaw struggled to find her voice. "I was going to stop by MoonClan camp to talk to Oneflight about MountainClan's situation when I heard fighting. I ran to MoonClan camp and found AshClan attacking them. I helped Oneflight treat Ferretpelt and then I heard Violetfur call out. When I looked out into the camp I saw Riverstar standing over Shadowstar's body and Violetfur was yelling at her that Riverstar killed him. Riverstar retreated with her warriors and then...Violetfur declared war on AshClan."

Dawnstar let out a shaky voice and stepped backwards. "I thought that Riverstar had changed..." Her green eyes brewing a storm of troubled emotions.

"We have to do something! You have to do something! This is what StarClan warned me about! StarClan warned me about a war! We--"

"Owlpaw." Pebblestep raised her tail, silencing Owlpaw. "Take a breath, panicking isn't going to solve anything."

"Owlpaw," Dawnstar stepped closer to the apprentice. "I understand what you saw was terrifying, and it is. I knew Riverstar was violent,

but to kill another Clan leader? I thought even she was better than that." Dawnstar sighed. "I know you want me to do something, but as of right now there is nothing I can do. I can't just tell Violetfur to not start a war on Riverstar and her Clan, they lost their leader and I can't change who Riverstar is."

Owlpaw flattened her hears and spoke in pure desperation. "But we have to do *something.* StarClan warned me about a war and I just saw it happen, *with* the blood moon right before my very eyes!"

"We will discuss this with the other leaders at the gathering, it is very soon and we will get it figured out before then. Something like this we need to approach delicately and calmly before we get either one of the other leaders enraged with us."

"But if we don't stop them then the Clans will be torn apart!" Owlpaw wailed, she felt so hopeless.

"Owlpaw." A gentle voice spoke and Pebblestep walked closer to her. "Dawnstar will come up with something and we'll get this figured out. It's scary, but there's not much we can do right now. Come with me, you're borderline in shock."

Owlpaw stared at Dawnstar with pleading eyes and the leader looked back at her sadly and sympathetically, but said nothing. Owlpaw let Pebblestep guide her out of the leader's den, feeling broken and scared. *This is what StarClan warned me about and I can do nothing to stop it. What am I supposed to do? Why won't anyone listen to me?*

Chapter 27

The silence and cloud of pain and sorrow that hung over MoonClan felt suffocating. Leopardpaw sat in the medicine cat den, the weight of what had happened the previous night weighing heavily on her shoulders. She felt a burning pain in her heart, and a lingering sense of fear deep in her belly. She didn't feel safe in her home anymore, nothing felt right.

The sudden attack from AshClan had been one thing, but to learn that Riverstar killed Shadowstar was an endless pain. Knowing that the Clan leader so many cats looked up to was now gone, living in the stars. Leopardpaw lifted her head slightly, looking around at the other cats in the den with her.

She saw Ebonywing who had deep claw marks on her foreleg, Daisyheart who had suffered deep bite wounds on her shoulders and forelegs, Swanfather who claw marks running up and down her flank, and then there was Ferretpelt. Leopardpaw had come across her Clanmate after Slatepaw nearly killed him.

She knew that Slatepaw had been an aggressive and violent cat, but in that moment she found herself terrified that he would kill Ferretpelt, so she attacked him. She ended up wounded pretty badly from Slatepaw's attack, with deep claw marks across her chest and her foreleg. She would make a full recovery, but the burning ache of her wounds was still very much there.

Shellpaw was also in the medicine cat den with the deep bite wound on his foreleg, the claw marks on his belly and his now shredded ear left him bloody and beat up but Oneflight promised that no cat was in danger and in time, they would all recover.

Oneflight was currently gone with Tallsong watching over the injured cats with minimal wound training knowledge as the medicine cat had gone with Violetfur to the Spirit Garden so she could receive her nine lives.

Leopardpaw sat up in her nest, no longer wishing to sit in the den. She felt her wounds ache but she looked at them and saw they weren't bleeding or anything. They were covered in an herb coating and cobwebs.

"How are you feeling, Leopardpaw?" Tallsong questioned from where she sat across the den.

"I feel alright." Leopardpaw responded. "My wounds are a little sore but other than I'm okay. Can I step outside and get some fresh-air?" "Sure." The dark-gray she-cat nodded. "Just take it slow, Oneflight told me you weren't too bad."

"Thank you." Leopardpaw dipped her head and carefully stood up, walking out of the medicine cat den and into the open air of the camp. The air was cold, but the sun was high in the sky and the chilled air felt better than the stuffy medicine cat den.

"Leopardpaw!" She heard a relieved cry and noticed Peachblossom and Breezetail rushing up to her. "I'm glad to see you on your paws." Her mother purred, gently nuzzling her. "How are you feeling?"

"I feel...okay." Leopardpaw sighed. "My wounds feel fine, but everything else..."

"I understand." Breezetail nodded, looking down for a moment. "Shadowstar has been leader for a so long, he was an incredible leader."

"He was." Peachblossom's eyes were shadowed with sorrow. "Without Shadowstar, Berryheart and I never would've been made MoonClan warriors." Breezetail leaned closer to Peachblossom and nuzzled his mate affectionately.

"It hurts a lot," Breezetail responded and looked at Leopardpaw. "But MoonClan will survive, we always do. Violetfur will make an incredible leader." Leopardpaw looked lovingly at her parents, grateful for their assuring words. *But I worry still worry about what comes next.* She thought. *Violetfur declared war on AshClan. I want Riverstar to face the consequences of killing Shadowstar but war? How*

many more cats will die? She looked at her family, she didn't want to lose anyone she cared about.

Leopardpaw sat with her parents, and they were soon joined by Ripplepaw and together the family shared some prey together. She enjoyed spending time with them, but the shadow of what happened hung heavy in the air still.

She soon heard movement behind her and noticed Shellpaw stepping out of the medicine cat den. "Shouldn't you be resting?" Leopardpaw aked him. "You were hurt quite bad."

"I'm alright." Shellpaw replied. "Tallfern told me I could get some fresh-air. The worst of it was my ear." He motioned slightly with his head towards his shredded ear, which was currently covered in cobwebs. "How are you?"

"I'm fine." Leopardpaw responded. "Sore, but fine."

"Has Violetfur returned yet?" Shellpaw questioned and Leopardpaw shook her head. "Hopefully everything went alright." He let out a tired sigh. "I'm gonna go check on my family. I'll see you in a bit, Leopardpaw. I'm glad you're safe." His voice softened with his final statement and Leopardpaw held his gaze for just a moment, feeling comforted. She watched as Shellpaw limped away, meeting up with Minnowpaw and Meadowpaw as well as their parents Swiftheart and Mosswind.

They waited a bit longer for their new leader to arrive and at long last, just before sunhigh, Violetfur and Oneflight arrived at the entrance to camp. A new light seemed to be shining in Violetfur's deep blue eyes.

She looked over her Clan for just a moment before crossing the camp. Violetfur climbed up the pile of rocks and boulders that made the leader's den and stood above her Clan. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather for a Clan meeting!" She spoke her first words as leader and it didn't take the Clan that long to gather and patiently wait for her to speak.

"The ceremony was a success," She began. "StarClan granted me

nine lives and the name Violetstar."

"Violetstar! Violetstar!" Despite the pain that plagued MoonClan, they still praised their new leader with pure respect and honor.

"Thank you." Violetstar dipped her head. "I knew that Shadowstar was on his final life and my time as leader was coming, though it was not supposed to be this way." Her voice trembled with anger slightly before she took a deep breath to compose herself. "Riverstar has been flexing her power long enough and I will not let her get away with this. No matter what happens, Riverstar must be held accountable!"

The cats of MoonClan rang out in cheers, carrying across the moorland. *While I don't want more fighting.* Leopardpaw thought. *Riverstar does need to face punishment for Shadowstar's death.*

"I am honored and proud to be your leader." Violetstar continued when the yelling died down. "Now, there are some duties I must preform as Clan leader. The first being my deputy." She looked over her Clan. "The cat I have chosen is a senior warrior who has been one of my closest friends, and a cat I respect deeply. I saw these words before the spirit of StarClan, so they may hear and approve my choice. Swiftheart will be the new deputy of MoonClan."

Swiftheart stood up, clearly looking a bit surprised but held his head high. He approached the front of the Clan and faced them. "Thank you for this honor, Violetstar. I will do my best to honor both you and this Clan."

"Swiftheart! Swiftheart!" The Clan cheered for their new deputy. *He will make a wonderful deputy.* She had heard nothing but good things about Swiftheart.

"There is one more ceremony I would like to preform." Violetstar continued. "One that has been pushed off for far too long." Her eyes rested on Shellpaw and his siblings. "Shellpaw, Minnowpaw and Meadowpaw. Could you please come forward."

Their eyes widened and they all exchanged a shocked look, but did just that. The three siblings joined together near the front of the

crowd. *They're earning their warrior names.* Leopardpaw thought happily. *They all deserve it.* She thought, her eyes resting on Shellpaw. *Especially him.* She recalled how bravely he fought Slatepaw and kept her safe, the thought made her heart flutter.

"You three apprentices have worked very hard and your warrior ceremony is long overdue. Two of you could've been warriors already, but you obligated to stay apprentices so you could share the ceremony together and I can't think of a better time to give you your warrior names, and I am glad that it is my first job as your new leader."

Leoparpdaw watched happily as Shellpaw and his sisters held their heads high. "Shellpaw, Minnowpaw, Meadowpaw. Do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend the Clan, even at the cost of your lives?"

"I do." Shellpaw spoke boldly and proudly and despite his wounds, kept his head high.

"I do." Minnowpaw and Meadowpaw repeated, showing the exact same amount of pride.

"Then by the powers of StarClan I give you your warrior names! Shellpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Shellstorm. MoonClan honors your loyalty and dedication." Violetstar leapt down from the leader's den and faced Shellstorm. She touched her muzzle to his forehead and Shellstorm licked her shoulder before stepping back. "Minnowpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Minnowstream. Meadowpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Meadowsong."

After Minnowstream and Meadowsong copied their brother, Violetstar continued. "I welcome you all as full warriors of MoonClan!". "Shellstorm! Minnowstream! Meadowsong!" The cats of MoonClan cheered one last time for their new warriors, Leopardpaw cheered along with them.

"I thank you all for your dedication during these times, I know not what the future brings but I promise you that I will not let cats like Riverstar take advantage of our Clan any longer. It is time for

MoonClan to take action. I will be discussing with Swiftheart as well as the rest of our senior warriors as to what our next course of action should be against AshClan. For now, rest and recover."

Violetstar ended the meeting and the senior warriors began to gather. Leopardpaw watched as Shellstorm and his siblings were swarmed by their mentors and parents to celebrate their new names. Leopardpaw wasn't sure if she should do the same, but she approached him none the less.

"Congratulations." Leopardpaw told Shellstorm. "You're finally a warrior."

Shellstorm looked at her, his eyes instantly softening. "I am, and it feels very nice." He chuckled. "But I'll miss getting to train with you, so hurry up and become a warrior too, okay?"

"I'll try my best." Leopardpaw waved in her tail in amusement and left Shellstorm to celebrate with his family. *I'm glad I have him as a friend, he is a very good warrior.*

Leopardpaw looked at her Clan, a lot had changed in a very short amount of time. MoonClan had a new leader, a new deputy and three new warriors. While she was happy in the moment, Leopardpaw knew that this happiness would not last, and that there was a lot of struggle and strife in MoonClan's future and she didn't know what would happen next, she didn't know how many more cats would die or what the future of MoonClan looked like. She just had to pray to StarClan that everything would be okay.

Chapter 28

"Sit still would you." Blackstorm said sharply. Slatepaw glared at the medicine cat but listened to him as Blackstorm placed a thick layer of herbs on his shoulder. Slatepaw winced from the stinging herbs, but he could handle it. It didn't compare to the pain he felt during the battle.

Slatepaw had blacked out from the pain after getting to Blackstorm during the battle and he had been in an out of consciousness for the rest of the night and early in the morning. He had woken up a bit ago, not longer after sunhigh. He knew that AshClan had won their fight, but he also learned that Riverstar had killed Shadowstar and left AshClan quite shaken up, but he couldn't imagine why.

Shadowstar was an old leader, he was clearly on his last legs. Slatepaw flicked his tail at the thought, knowing that his Clan was showing doubt about the fight. He didn't care to think about that now, he just wanted to get out of the medicine cat den.

AshClan had suffered minimal injuries, with Slatepaw being the worst. Haresong had a nasty bite on her shoulder, Primroseheart had some deep claw wounds on her chest and Sageheart had several wounds across her entire body but they were already recovering. *MoonClan was no match for us, clearly.*

There was something more pressing on his mind though, something that he had been waiting a long time for. He wanted nothing more to leave this den and make Leafdawn keep her promise, but he wasn't going to force his way around, he would not risk jeopardizing his warrior ceremony again.

"There." Blackstorm said a few moments later, stepping back and admiring the wound wrappings. "You can go off to Leafdawn now, but *be careful.*" His icy blue eyes glared at Slatepaw. "I know that you're probably going to have your warrior ceremony but you still need to take things slow or I'll make you stay in this den even longer."

"Fine." Slatepaw lashed his tail. He wouldn't argue with Blackstorm, he wouldn't argue with anyone. *Just let me out of this stupid den.*

"Get out of here then I'm tired of you glaring at me all the time." Blackstorm flicked Slatepaw with his tail and the apprentice withheld a growl. *How can they expect me not to argue with this arrogant furball.* Despite his urge to claw Blackstorm's nose, he listened and left the medicine cat den, having to limp as he did so.

Slatepaw stepped into the snowy camp, looking at the bright sun above for a brief moment. He breathed in the fresh air of AshClan camp, feeling the sweet scent of pine replenish his strength. He hated being stuck in the medicine cat den. He limped forward, his eyes scanning the crowd of AshClan cats.

There was an air of uncertainty within the Clan, they were clearly upset about the death of the MoonClan leader but Slatepaw didn;t care right now. He found Leafdawn sitting with Dustfall and Rabbitspring and limped over to her. She looked at Slatepaw with a curious look. "Did Blackstorm say you could leave?"

"I wouldn't be standing here if he didn't." Slatepaw explained. "I let him do all that he needed, he just told me to take it easy which I will." He narrowed his eyes. "But you told me I earned my warrior name. I kept my promise."

"I know you did, Slatepaw." Leafdawn let out a sigh, but gave him a pleasant look for the first time in nearly a moon. "Come on," She stood up. "Let's go talk to Riverstar." Slatepaw nodded and noticed Dustfall and Rabbitspring looking at him with amusement. He ignored them and just followed his mentor towards the leader's den.

As they approached, he could hear the voices of Riverstar and Stormheart grow louder as they walked closer to the den. "This is going to be very difficult to deal with." Stormheart spoke. "But we have to think of something."

"I know--" Riverstar spoke, her voice clearly distressed. "I didn't--I didn't *mean* for this to happen. I never wanted to kill him, Stormheart!" Leafdawn stopped for a moment.

"I know, Riverstar." Stormheart's voice was a lot steadier than the leader's. "We'll figure it out, but we will face to face MoonClan at the gathering. We will figure out how to handle this together."

"Excuse me, Riverstar?" Leafdawn raised her voice, calling into the den.

There was a moment of silence before Riverstar stepped out of the den. Her eyes were exhausted and her pelt was ruffled, clear signs of stress. "Yes, Leafdawn?" She looked from Leafdawn to Slatepaw.

"I made a promise to Slatepaw, that if he obeyed orders and fought well in the battle that I would allow him to earn his warrior name. He did just that, he kept his promise and fight well despite his injuries."

Riverstar seemed to regain her composure and lifted her head. "As I said before, I am not the one who decides when an apprentice gets his warrior name. If you say that Slatepaw has earned his name then I will honor your wishes, Leafdawn." Slatepaw lifted his head, excitement sparking to life inside of him. "Allow me a few moments and I will hold the ceremony."

"Thank you, Riverstar." Slatepaw spoke up. His anger about the day he had been robbed of his ceremony had been fading, and he could tell that his leader was struggling. *She's still allowing me to be a warrior despite what happened.*

Riverstar's blue gaze softened for a moment. "You're welcome, Slatepaw. Thank you for taking the time to learn what it means to be an AshClan warrior." She dipped her head and turned back into the leader's den.

"You really have improved." Leafdawn said as the two of them stepped away from the den. "Whether you actually gained some manners or respect or just learned how to hold your tongue and keep your thoughts to yourself, I'm still proud of you." Slatepaw glanced up at his mentor. He couldn't tell if he had changed or not and he didn't really care, the only thing he cared about was earning his warrior name.

"Thank you." Slatepaw dipped his head, he didn't have anything else to say. He sat patiently near the center of camp until Riverstar emerged from her den. She had smoothed down her pelt and she looked a lot more like the fierce AshClan leader that her Clan expected her to be. Riverstar made her way to the center of camp and raised her voice.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather for a Clan meeting!" Slatepaw stood up, holding his head tall. He walked with a powerful stride, he could feel his confidence and pride swelling within him. *It's finally time.* Slatepaw sat the front of the crowd, close to Riverstar and Stormheart. "While there are several things I wish to discuss with the Clan," Riverstar began. "It is time, at long last, for one of our most arrogant and stubborn apprentices to finally earn his warrior name."

Slatepaw held his head high, ignoring the remark. He could feel the eyes of his Clanmates burning into him as he puffed out his chest. "Despite his arrogance, Slatepaw has proven his strength and skill as a warrior time and time again and I know that he will make an incredible AshClan warrior." *Get on with it.* Slatepaw thought silently. "Slatepaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend the Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do." Slatepaw spoke bold and confidently. He wanted to make sure no cat in this Clan could deny that he was meant to be a warrior.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Slatepaw, from this day forward you will be known as Slateheart. AshClan honors your strength and resilience and I welcome you as a full warrior of AshClan."

Slateheart relished in his new name and stepped forward, repeating the ritual he watched many times before. He allowed Riverstar to touch her muzzle to his forehead and rasped his tongue over her shoulder before stepping back. Slateheart met Riverstar's intense blue gaze and she gave him a nod of approval.

Slateheart turned around to face his Clan. "Slateheart! Slateheart!" The Clan cheered his name and he held his head proudly. *Finally. I*

should've been made a warrior moons ago, but at least it's finally over.

"Before I end this meeting," Riverstar continued, giving Slateheart the signal to sit down and listen. "I'm sure some of you have a few concerns regarding the battle and I want to begin by saying it was never my intention to kill Shadowstar. Not only was I not aware he was on his last life but I wasn't attempt to kill him. I went to bite his shoulder and he twisted, instead I bit into his neck and there was nothing I could do to stop it. I made you all be certain that no MoonClan cats would die and I couldn't follow the same advice, I understand if you are all frustrated and upset with me."

"We don't blame you, Riverstar." Harewhisker spoke up. "Casualties are apart of Clan life, and yes it hurts but that's the truth. Shadowstar knew he was on his last life, and he chose to fight. He knew that challenging us would lead to a fight, all the Clans know what kind of Clan we are."

"What are we going to do from here?" It was Lilyclaw who spoke up. "We can assume that Violetfur, now Violetstar I presume, is not going to take this lightly. She may seek revenge."

"MoonClan are hardly the revenge seeking type." Nightheart added.

"Violetstar is." Graypelt added. "She's always been a more aggressive MoonClan cat, I imagine its why Shadowstar chose her as deputy. She's not afraid of a fight."

"We will have to face Violetstar at the gathering," Riverstar said. " I will humbly apologize for the death of Shadowstar and take full accountability. I will then see if perhaps we can call this entire situation off and return to our normal lives. Even being more aggressive, I can't see Violetstar putting her warriors in danger to avenge Shadowstar."

"And if she doesn't?" Dustfall questioned.

"Then we will go from there and figure out a plan."

The Clan seemed to be satisfied with Riverstar's answers, and Slateheart couldn't figure out why she felt so guilty about it.

Shadowstar was an old leader. Like Harewhisker said, he knew he was on his last life and still chose to fight. The meeting dissipated with many of the AshClan cats talking about the future.

Meanwhile, Slateheart was swarmed by his family. Mistflight and Dewpetal rushing up to him and Silvermoon as well, nuzzling his cheek fondly. "You finally did it." She purred, her blue eyes sparkling. "I'm so proud of you, and your father would be as well."

"Thank you." Was all Slateheart said. "I'm glad it finally happened." He kept his thoughts about being annoyed it took so long to himself and just focused on celebrating his achievement with his family. While he did so, he briefly thought about Ashblaze. *I hope you are proud of me, father. You were the one cat who knew my true strength.*

Chapter 29

"You did a great job, Blossompaw." Mudfall praised. "You didn't miss a single piece of prey. I'm proud of you." Blossompaw held her head high at Mudfall's praise. "As promised, you can come to the gathering tonight."

Excitement bubbled up inside of Blossompaw and her tail twitched happily. "Thank you so much, Mudfall." She dipped her head respectfully.

"You should be thanking yourself, you're the one who passed the assessment." Mudfall gave her an approving nod and began leading Blossompaw back to camp after they gathered her caught prey.

For the first time in moons Blossompaw felt as if she had been making genuine improvements with her hunting ability. She had adjusted to hunting in the snow, and she had made less and less mistakes. Even when she did make mistakes she made certain not to dwell on them, she would think about *why* she made the mistake and she would make sure she didn't make the same mistake again.

She hated to admit it, but Slatepaw's advice had helped her a lot. Not that she would *ever* let him know. She knew that when she saw him at the gathering tonight he would have bragging rights about their contest, but she didn't care. She could handle his insults. She had to admit she enjoyed going back and forth with Slatepaw, but she wasn't sure why she enjoyed it so much. Maybe she enjoyed watching him get annoyed, she wasn't sure but it still amused her.

Blossompaw shook away her thoughts about Slatepaw and followed Mudfall back into SunClan camp where everything was business as usual. The forest was still snowy, but it hadn't been snowing nearly as much and the sun had been out most days. She looked around, watching her Clanmates work and talk with each other, but there was one cat she worried about the most.

She briefly saw Owlpaw vanishing into the medicine cat den. She

had barely seen her sister over the last half-moon or so. Ever since she had came back to the camp with blood on her paws and told Dawnstar that AshClan had attacked MoonClan and Riverstar killed Shadowstar. The news had been incredibly shocking to the cats of SunClan but Blossompaw could see how much it was bothering Owlpaw as she had seen the whole thing take place, she had also informed SunClan that MountainClan was without a medicine cat and that was taking a mental toll on her as well.

Blossompaw wished she could help her sister, but Owlpaw was burying herself in her work as a medicine cat and wasn't talking much to anyone. Blossompaw could get Owlpaw to agree to share some with with their brothers, but she would just sit silently with a damaged look in her eyes. It made Blossompaw's heart ache that Owlpaw was struggling so much. She had tried to figure out how to help her, but nothing seemed to work.

Blossompaw couldn't bring Shadowstar back to life and she couldn't give MountainClan a new medicine cat. She was a little upset that the responsibility of finding a MountainClan medicine cat had fallen solely onto Owlpaw's shoulders. *She's a SunClan cat, not a MountainClan one.* She knew that Owlpaw had played a huge role in forming the Clan, but the Clan was formed. It was no longer her responsibility to take care of that Clan, Blossompaw just wished Owlpaw would see it that way.

Blossompaw let out a sigh, she had been improving her warrior skills but she felt like she could do nothing as a sister to support Owlpaw. *She's dealing with things that no apprentice should be dealing with. It's not fair to her.*

Blossompaw waited for the rest of the day to pass and soon it was time for the Clan to start preparing to leave for the gathering. She stood with Oakpaw and Rushpaw who were equally as excited to attend the gathering. Blossompaw watched as Owlpaw joined up with Honeyfrost and Pebblestep, she looked exhausted. *Has she not been sleeping?* Blossompaw wondered anxiously.

"Before we leave," Dawnstar spoke up, silencing the sound of chatter from the rest of SunClan. "We need to be prepared for the situation we'll be heading into. Things will be incredibly tense

between AshClan and MoonClan but as of right now it is not SunClan's business to get involved." Blossompaw noticed Owlpaw staring down at the ground while Dawnstar spoke. "We will honor the loss of Shadowstar, as he was a great warrior, friend and leader, but we will not be starting nor joining in on any arguments between the two Clans. I will do my best to mediate the situation and prevent a physical fight if it arises."

"Be respectful of both Clans." Cinderflame added. "We're not taking sides here regardless of what you may think of Riverstar's or Violetstar's actions. Taking the side of either Clan could aggravate the other and we don't want to get involved in their fight."

"What if their fighting gets out of control?" Redclaw questioned. "We are right in the middle of their two territories."

"If one of the two Clans decides to attack us then we will act." Dawnstar replied. "But until then, we are not taking sides unless we are attacked or we believe one leader is breaking the warrior code and putting their own Clan in danger."

All of SunClan seemed to agree with Dawnstar's statement, all of SunClan except for Owlpaw. Blossompaw could see doubt and uncertainty brewing in her sister's eyes, but she didn't say anything.

"Let's keep moving, it's getting colder." Dawnstar instructed and began guiding her Clan towards the gathering hollow. Blossompaw followed, hoping that everything would go smoothly, yet she couldn't help but feel it was a naive though.

*****

SunClan arrived in the gathering hollow right after LichenClan did. Before they stepped into the hollow, Dawnstar turned to her Clan. "Do not tell the cats of LichenClan or MountainClan the news about Shadowstar, it is not our news to share." The warriors of SunClan silently agreed and they ventured down into the gathering hollow.

Right as they entered, Blossompaw noticed Mountainstar arriving as well. She had her deputy beside her and her small collection of warriors. Owlpaw had told Blossompaw that in addition to their

medicine cat, four other warriors had left as well. Blossompaw couldn't help but wonder why they left. At least the rest of the MountainClan cats seemed happy.

With MountainClan arriving, Blossompaw noticed Owlpaw seemed eager to run off and talk to Mountainstar but she remained by Honeyfrost's side. *She needs to stop worrying so much about them.* Blossompaw sighed. *But I don't know if that will ever happen.*

Not long after MountainClan arrived, AshClan did as well. Blossompaw could tell that AshClan was tense. Riverstar was at the front, her eyes determined but stressed. Her eyes scanned the hollow. *She's looking for MoonClan.* Blossompaw noted.

"Good evening all of you." Timberstar dipped his head, welcoming the other leaders. "It's good to see you all."

"You as well, Timberstar." Dawnstar returned the gesture. "Hope all is well in LichenClan."
"Things are great, thank you." Timberstar responded and before the conversation could continue, MoonClan entered the hollow. Blossompaw turned to see Violetstar at the front of the Clan with the warrior Swiftheart by her side. *He must be the new deputy.* Violetstar's face showed nothing but anger and hatred towards Riverstar. The AshClan leader tensed up upon seeing MoonClan arrive.

"Violetfur?" Timberstar mewed, giving her a highly concerned look. "Where is Shadowstar? Is everything alright?"

Violetstar's gaze remained permanently fixed on Riverstar. "Why don't you ask Riverstar?" Timberstar looked to Riverstar in confusion, and Mountainstar was showing the same confusion, Riverstar visibly tensed and hesitated. "Oh you don't want to tell them what you did?" Violetstar lashed her tail. "Fine. I'll tell them." She raised her voice. "Riverstar *killed* Shadowstar after she and her warriors attacked our camp."

Gasps and shocked whispers spread throughout the five Clans but Violetstar did not lessen her intense gaze. "I *never* intended to kill Shadowstar." Riverstar stepped forward.

"If you hadn't attacked our camp he would still be alive!" Violetstar snapped. "I don't care that you didn't *mean* to kill him, you still did!"

"I attacked because your Clan has been showing nothing but disrespect towards mine for the past several moons, because you thought you could disrespect my Clan without answering for it!" Riverstar hissed.

"Your Clan doesn't deserve respect!" Violetstar's eyes were blazing with fury and Blossompaw could tell that both MoonClan and AshClan cats were becoming more and more aggressive. "Especially you, Riverstar! You are a disgraceful excuse for a leader!"

"*Enough!"* The voice of Dawnstar rang above both leaders as she stepped in between them. "What happened between AshClan and MoonClan is not to be solved with claws and fangs." She shouted. "Especially not at a gathering. Violetstar the loss of Shadowstar is tragic and we are deeply sorry for his loss but you know you better than to break the warrior code during a truce, that is not what MoonClan cats do." Violetstar let out a low growl but remained silent and Riverstar did the same.

Violetstar cleared her throat. "There is an easy way to fix this, Riverstar." She spoke confidently.

"And that is?" Riverstar growled.

"Step down. Renounce yourself as AshClan's leader and give up your nine lives. Give your leadership to Stormheart, a cat who is actually respectable. You have ran out your time and honor as AshClan's leader." Blossompaw's eyes widened, Violetstar demanded Riverstar step down as leader? She didn't think any leader could force another to do something like that.

"And who exactly do you think you are to demand such things?" Rivestar snarled. "Last I checked you were not the voice of StarClan."

"It's simple." Violetstar's tone turned cold. "You either step down, or I will make sure you step down."

"I don't take too kindly for *threats*, Violetstar." Riverstar's arrogance was bubbling up once again. "

"It's your choice, Riverstar. Step down or you will regret what you have done to Shadowstar."

Riverstar held her head high. "I will not let you boss me around like I'm some petulant kit."

"Then so be it." Violetstar bared her teeth. "Just know, that any blood spilled from here on out is on your paws." She turned her back on the other leaders. "MoonClan! We're leaving, and we will not be in attendance of another gathering until Riverstar is no longer leader."

"Violetstar--" Dawnstar attempted to speak but the MoonClan leader silenced her.

"Dawnstar you cannot change my mind and do not get in my way." Dawnstar's ears flattened and the cats of MoonClan soon vanished.

There was a long, painful moment of silence as the remaining four Clans all turned their attention to Riverstar. "I know what you're all thinking." Riverstar said, anger and frustration seething in her gaze. "But it was never my intention to kill Shadowstar. We were going to launch a small attack and then retreat to send a message to MoonClan to respect my warriors."

"How many times has a simple AshClan attack ended in death?" Brackenpelt raised his voice.

"Silence." Dawnstar said, quietly but firmly. "Riverstar, you know the dangers of any attack."

"Of course I do." Riverstar growled. "But MoonClan was planning to attack us as well, a fight was inevitable." She let out a stressed out sigh. "So what are the rest of you planning to do? Tell me to step down as well."

"This is not our business." Timberstar responded. "What you chose to do and what Violetstar chooses to do does not concern us." He looked to Mountainstar who looked completely shocked and

overwhelmed by the situation. "I suggest you take the same stance on the matter. You don't need to be making enemies." Riverstar eyed Mountainstar for just a moment before looking back at the other Clan leaders.

Dawnstar sighed. "Do we wish to continue this gathering? It's clear Violetstar won't be returning."

"I say we do." Timberstar spoke up. "The gathering is part of the warrior code and I don't intend on breaking it."

"Then I'll begin." Dawnstar took the center of attention. "SunClan welcomed to two new warriors this moon, Bramblestrike and Mapleshine." There were cheers, but they were incredibly toned down due to what had just happened. *I feel bad for them.* Blossompaw thought. "Our queen Petalbreeze also gave birth to two new kits, Lightkit and Ivykit."

After the lighthearted cheer, Timberstar stood up. "Life in LichenClan has been peaceful despite the cold, we've had a small outbreak of sickness but Roseheart and her apprentice Emberpaw have been working hard to keep our Clan healthy."

It was now Riverstar's turn. "Despite everything else you all saw, AshClan has welcomed three new warriors. Mistflight, Dewpetal and Slateheart." The cheers for AshClan were even weaker. *So he earned his warrior name after all.* Blossompaw thought, turning her attention to the group of AshClan cats.

She easily spotted Slateheart sitting amongst his Clanmates, she could see that he had a pretty nasty looking wound on his shoulder. His gaze seemed to be pretty focused on Riverstar, but after a few moments he looked down and turned towards Blossompaw, as if he could sense her looking at him. His amber eyes narrowed and Blossompaw quickly turned away.

Why was I staring at him for so long? Blossompaw questioned herself, she looked at her paws and felt her pelt burning slightly.

"If that's all," Rivestar spoke up. "I'll be taking my warriors home." The AshClan leader quickly gathered her warriors and led them out

of the gathering hollow. Blossompaw watched after them in disappointment, part of her had been wanting to talk to Slateheart and she wasn't quite sure why. *He probably wouldn't want to speak to me anyway.* She brushed her own thoughts off.

"Did you know what happened to Shadowstar?" She heard the voice of Timberstar speaking to Dawnstar who nodded.

"Owlpaw just so happened to be crossing through their territory after visiting MountainClan when the attack happened. She saw everything and Violetstar gave her permission to report it to me."

Timberstar sighed. "Violetstar is being unreasonable with her demands." He said. "But Riverstar is also at fault. I can't even begin to name the amount of cats who have died because AshClan wanted to prove a point."

"I agree." Dawnstar nodded slowly. "But I will be keeping my Clan out of the fight."
"As will I." Timberstar looked to Mountainstar who nodded.

"My Clan is not prepared to a fight, and like Timberstar said I am not looking to make enemies. You have all been nothing but welcoming to me and my warriors."

Dawnstar took a deep breath and glanced towards the cloudy sky. "We should get home, it will start snowing soon. I wish both of you safe travels."
"You as well."

Blossompaw followed her Clanmates out of the gathering hollow, fear weighing on her chest. A lot had just happened and she was feeling a flurry of confusion emotions. The tensions between MoonClan and AshClan were going stronger constantly and as her Clanmates had pointed out, SunClan territory was directly between AshClan and MoonClan territory and Riverstar would stop at nothing to "prove a point."

Then Blossompaw's concern shifted to Owlpaw who was even more visibly stressed by the events of the gathering. *I can't help her.* Blossompaw felt incredibly helpless, like there was so much going

on in her life and there was nothing she could do to help. She thought about Slateheart again, and the hunting competition she had with him.

She had finally began to improve her hunting skills thanks to him, and despite everything going on she seemed to be thinking about him more than she wanted to. *Owlpaw. Slateheart. Violetstar. Riverstar.* A chaotic storm of troubled, anxious and confused thoughts swarmed Blossompaw's head and heart and she felt an unbearable weight of uncertainty. She was terrified of what the future would bring.

Chapter 30

Mountainstar lead her Clan back to camp, the weight of what happened at the gathering stull hung in the back of her mind. She didn't know what to do with two Clans fighting such an intense battle. Especially one that resulted in the death of a Clan leader. She had been feeling a storm of conflicted feelings. She had been taught by the other Clans that Riverstar was a well respected leader, strong and a bit cocky at times but noble.

Then at the gathering after she was exposed for killing Shadowstar it seemed like every single warrior aside from AshClan saw her as a violent and bloodthirsty cat. *She did kill Shadowstar.* Mountainstar had to agree that was a terrible tragedy that the MoonClan leader had been killed. *But she looked genuinely stressed about, she didn't mean to kill him.* She didn't know what to feel.

Mountainstar and her warriors finally reached the camp and she could tell they were nervous about what had happened at the gathering as well. "Do you think that the issue between MoonClan and AshClan is going to be a problem for us?" It was Hazelspring who spoke up.

Mountainstar shook her head. "I don't believe so. We will be following Timberstar's advice and staying out of the conflict. If we keep a neutral stance then we shouldn't have any issues from either Clan." She could tell that her Clanmates were still nervous. "We have to worry about our own Clan right now." She added. "We need to keep hunting and providing for each other. We don't have a medicine cat right now, we will not be getting involved. I promise our Clan will remain safe." Those words seemed to help give some peace of mind to her warriors. "Now return to your dens, stay warm and get some rest."

She dismissed her warriors and apprentices until only she and Nettleheart remaind in the center of camp. "Do you believe that the other Clans won't bother us?"

"I don't see why they would." Mountainstar sighed and started walking towards her own den, Nettleheart close behind her "We don't share a border with AshClan and they've never shown us any hostility and MoonClan has always been kind towards us. We'll keep our distance."

"I hope you're right." Nettleheart let out a sigh. "Last thing we need is a fight right now with no medicine cat."

Mountainstar nodded. "We'll find a new medicine cat in time."

"Did Owlpaw say anything to you at the gathering?"

"We really didn't get a chance to talk, she seemed stressed about everything since she apparently watched the entire thing happen. I imagine if she had heard something she would've made sure to tell me."

The two of them arrived at Mountainstar's den and she faced her deputy. "We just have to remain stong, for each other."

"Of course." Nettleheart stepped closer, touching her muzzle to Mountainstar's. The leader closed her eyes and embraced her deputy's warmth. "You'd doing a wonderful job, keeping us safe."

"I'm just doing my job as leader." Mountainstar breathed out, moving closer and affectionately nuzzling Nettleheart. Ever since Mothflower and the others left, Nettleheart had been spending every night in Mountainstar's den, the two of them curled up together and sharing their warmth. It had been the most peaceful nights of her entire life.

"Let's go to bed." Nettleheart urged her. "It's been a long and cold night." Mountainstar couldn't agree more as she turned and followed Nettleheart into the warm den. Mountainstar knew how she felt about Nettleheart, and she knew how Nettleheart felt about her.

They hadn't officially state wanted they were, but they didn't need to. When Mountainstar looked at Nettleheart she felt happiness and safety, comfort and love. That was all that she needed to know.

Mountainstar got into her nest with Nettleheart, the two of them wrapping their forelegs around each other, their tails intertwining and Mountainstar nestling her head under Nettleheart's chin. No more words needed to be said as the two of them stayed warm together, and surrounded by the comfort of the cat she cared about dearly, Mountainstar fell into a peaceful sleep.

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When Mountainstar woke up Nettleheart was gone, presumably to plan the day's patrols. Mountainstar sat up in her nest and let out a yawn, stretching out her limbs and shaking off the sleepiness. After smoothing down her messed up fur, Mountainstar left her den to see how her Clan was doing this morning.

She stepped into the main section of camp just in time to see Spiderstorm and Turnipclaw leaving with Finchpaw and Petalpaw to go training. Since Antwhisker had been Petalpaw's original mentor, she had assigned Turnipclaw to take over her training now that he was gone and he was doing a great job, him and Petalpaw got along very well.

Mountainstar turned her attention to Riverstep, the expecting queen was sitting with her sisters as she usually did, both Briarfall and Hazelspring were supporting here with the father of her kits being gone. She could see a notable growth in her belly size as the kits grew inside of her. Mountainstar couldn't wait for the kits to be born, but she also needed them to wait until MountainClan had a new medicine cat, whoever that would be.

She had tried to think of who the new medicine cat could be, wondering if it would be a warrior they already had or an outsider. She couldn't see any of her current warriors becoming medicine cats so she assumed it would be another outsider. *I just need StarClan to hurry up.* She sighed.

Mountainstar decided to wait until Nettleheart to returned to see if there were any patrols she could join to get her paws moving. She helped herself to some fresh-kill, a small mouse. Their fresh-kill pile was well stocked, but she assumed it helped that MountainClan seemed smaller than the other Clans.

After she finished her mouse she saw Poppysong walking with Fireclaw as they talked about something. She laughed at something he said, but her laugh was interrupted by a series of coughs. Mountainstar's head jerked up and she quickly rose to her paws. She quickly padded over to Poppysong while Fireclaw looked over her with concern in his eyes. "Are you alright?" Mountainstar questioned upon reaching the black she-cat.

"Yeah," She responded, clearing her throat after the coughing. "My throat just hurts a bit."

Mountainstar felt uncertainty rise in her chest. "We should get you some herbs, we don't want this getting any worse."

"I'm fine, Mountainstar, really." Poppysong assured her. "I get coughs all the time during leaf-bare."

"You should go." Fireclaw nudged her. "Just to be safe." Poppysong met Fireclaw's yellow gaze and held it for a moment. Mountainstar could see a fondness between them.

"Alright, alright." Poppysong sighed. "Go ahead, Mountainstar."

"Thank you." Fireclaw touched his muzzle to hers and the two of them began walking away from the ginger tabby.

"You two seem to be quite close." Mountainstar noted with a purr.

Poppysong's eyes softened. "He is a very wonderful cat." Mountainstar felt warmth in her heart knowing that so many of her Clanmates were forming deep relationships. Perhaps Fireclaw and Poppysong would have kits and MountainClan would continue to grow and get stronger.

Mountainstar and Poppysong reached the medicine cat den and Mountainstar quickly went over the herbs that Owlpaw had taught her for coughs. *It's just a minor cough so I think tansy is the best? No, coltsfoot.* She went towards the coltsfoot. *Wait, coltsfoot is for whitecough, tansy is for a normal cough and I don't think this is whitecough yet.* She looked at Poppysong. Other than her cough she looked fine, hear eyes and nose weren't streaming and she wasn't

complaining of a fever or shortness of breath. *Yes, tansy is the way to go.*

Mountainstar picked up a small bundle of the golden flower, remembering Owlpaw's warning not to give a large amount. "Eat this." Mountainstar instructed and Poppysong gave the tansy a wary sniff, but ate it anyway. She made a fact at the taste, but swallowed it. "That should help with your cough, that's what Owlpaw taught me."

"Thank you, Mountainstar." Poppysong mewed.

"Let me know if you feel any worse, and tell any other cats who are coughing to come see me for the same thing. We can't risk sickness spreading without a medicine cat."

"Of course." Poppysong waved her tail. "Thank you again." The warrior turned out of the medicine cat den and left Mountainstar alone. She let out a sigh and felt fear growing deep in her belly. *Our first signs of sickness.* She thought with a heavy heart. *Please let it be only a small cough.*

Mountainstar left the den as well and looked over her Clanmates, making sure that they were all safe. She watched then all very closely, paranoid that any more of them might start coughing.

A while later, just before sunrise, Nettleheart returned with her small patrol of Dewleaf, Sparrowpaw and Wrenpaw. Mountainstar caught her eye very quickly and after bidding farewell to the rest of her patrol, she crossed the camp over to Mountainstar. "Is everything okay?" Nettleheart questioned. "You look stressed again."

"Poppysong has a cough." Mountainstar answered with a sigh. "Sickness is starting to show and we don't have a medicine cat yet."

Nettleheart sat down next to her and began rasping her tongue across Mountainstar's shoulder in a comforting manner, pressing her body against the leader's. "It will be okay, we'll get through this. How bad was her cough?"

"Not too bad." Mountainstar replied, enjoying Nettleheart's comfort.

"I gave her some tansy like Owlpaw told me too, but I still worried that it will get works or that she's not the only one."

"We have the herbs we need, and you learned directly from a medicine cat." Nettleheart assured her. "I'm sure that we will be just fine, alright?"

"I hope so." Mountainstar sighed and closed her eyes, just wanting to focus on Nettleheart peacefully.

Her peace was quickly ruined by a series of coughs. Her eyes opened and she looked at Poppysong who was sitting with Fireclaw and looked just fine, she heard the coughs again and turned her head towards the direction of them. When her eyes met the cat that was coughing and her heart dropped. The cough was coming from Sparrowpaw. *No.* Mountainstar thought. *He can't get sick, not him. Not my kits.*

Mountainstar jumped to her paws and ran over to Sparrowpaw. "Are you alright?" She demanded, looking all over him in a panic.

"I'm fine, I'm fine." Sparrowpaw replied, stepping back a bit. "Just a--" He broke off with more coughs. Panic rose in Mountainstar's chest.

"Come with me." She guided Sparrowpaw, not taking no for an answer as she took her kit to the empty medicine cat den. *I'm giving him coltsfoot.* She told herself, his cough was already worse than Poppysong's.

She gave the herbs and he took them without complaint but Mountainstar felt an overwhelming fear growing in her chest. *StarClan please, if you're listening; please send us a medicine cat. I can't do this alone.*

Chapter 31

The sounds of battle raged through the air, the scent of blood was all that Owlpaw could smell. She was surrounded by fighting warriors, they wrestled and tore each other apart. Owlpaw was frozen in place, staring into the dead eyes of Shadowstar as he lay lifeless on the ground. Over head she heard the screech of an owl, which pulled her from her dream.

Owlpaw jolted awake in her nest, back in the medicine cat den. She looked around to make certain she was safe in the medicine cat but saw Pebblestep and Honeyfrost still sleeping. She sat up in her nest, feeling shaken up by her nightmare, even though she felt as if she should be used to it by now.

She sat up, knowing she wouldn't be able to sleep any longer. She washed her paws and smoothed down her pelt which was sticking out at odd angels and unkempt from tossing and turning in her nest all night. She looked over at her fellow medicine cats, sleeping soundly and decided to get started with her day, even if it was before dawn.

She stood up and stepped into the camp, shivering as she was hit by a wave of cold air. *Leaf-bare is too long.* She thought, her mind still groggy from her short sleep. She spotted Flamepetal sitting at the front of the camp, keeping watch over the Clan while everyone else slept, the moonlight reflecting off her orange pelt.

Owlpaw had been told to gather more tansy after treating a cough that Larkthorn had. It turned out to be nothing but a cold and she recovered within a few days. So far, that was the only sickness SunClan had faced but it was only a matter of time before more sickness began to spread.

As a result Owlpaw had felt more stress than she ever had in her life. She was constantly on the lookout for signs from StarClan about MountainClan's medicine cat all while feeling constant fear knowing that a war was brewing between the Clans and Dawnstar

wouldn't do anything about it. She felt helpless, and worst of all she felt hopeless. It had been a moon since the death of Shadowstar and nothing had gotten better.

"You're up early." The sudden voice of Flamepetal made Owlpaw jump, she didn't realize she had just been standing in the cold staring off into nothingness.

"Oh," Owlpaw replied, feeling slightly embarrassed. "Yeah, just can't sleep."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Flamepetal looked at her for a few moments. "Everything okay?"

Owlpaw sighed. "Just a lot going on, I suppose." She replied. "I'll be alright."

"I know I'm older than you, and a we don't talk that much but you can talk about it if you want." *I'd like to, but I don't know if Flamepetal could understand, but I can give her the short version. It may be nice to at least get something off my chest.* Owlpaw sat down beside the warrior, resting her tail across her paws.

"I'm just really stressed about leaf-bare and the whole situation with AshClan and MoonClan." Owlpaw explained.

"I would be too as a medicine cat." Flamepetal replied. "Especially after such a long period of peace. There hasn't been a fight among the Clans since before you were born. It is scary, fighting is scary." There was a shadow of pain in Flamepetal's eyes. "You never know when you might lose someone in a fight."

She's lost someone. Owlpaw knew that both of Flamepetal's parents were dead, but she didn't know how they died. "Who did you lose in a fight? You're talking from experience."

"Both of my parents." Flamepetal looked at her paws. "First my mother, Willownose, in the battle against Thornstar. I remember telling Dawnstar how terrified I was of losing someone and in the end I lost one of the most important cats in my life." Her voice grew more unsteady as she spoke about her mother. "Then moons later,

AshClan attacked us and I lost my father Bramblepelt."

"I'm sorry for your loss." Owlpaw dipped her head in sympathy.

"I know other cats suffer loss all the time, it's part of being a warrior but I never stopped being scared. My siblings all had support, Fawnheart had Turtleblaze, Brackenpelt had Squirreltail and Heatherflight eventually gained Flashtail but me?" Her eyes showed a painful sense of longing. "Sorry." She shook her head. "I offered to support you not dump my own issues onto you, you're just an apprentice."

"It's okay." Owlpaw assured her. It felt like Flamepetal needed someone to listen to her too, and hearing her vent about her problems distracted Owlpaw if only for a few moments. "I think we just both needed someone to talk to."

Flamepetal let out a small *mrrow* of laughter. "I suppose you're right. You're a good cat, Owlpaw." She touched her tail tip to Owlpaw's shoulder. "I'm sure you'll figure out a way through all this, it may be stressful now but I believe you can find your way through."

"Thank you." Owlpaw could tell that Flamepetal's words for genuine, and despite not knowing the older warrior very well, she did feel comforted by her words. She looked towards the sky and the two she-cats watched the sun slowly rise over the mountains. "I should get to work." Owlpaw sighed slightly. "The half-moon is tonight and I want to get everything done early."

"Good luck." Flamepetal nodded. "Thanks for keeping me company."

"Of course." Owlpaw purred softly and traveled off to go gather the herbs she needed. There was still a lot weighing on her heart but for the time being, her mind felt a little more clear.

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"Do you think Oneflight will show up?" Owlpaw questioned the other two medicine cats nervously.

"I'm not sure." Pebblestep answered honestly as the SunClan cats

neared the spot they usually met up with Oneflight. "Violetstar said MoonClan wouldn't be attending any gatherings but I don't know about half-moons."

Owlpaw stayed silent as they approached the border. She hoped that they would see Oneflight, she didn't see why Violetstar would keep Oneflight from communicating with his ancestors.

As they neared the border, Owlpaw felt relief as she saw Oneflight sitting and waiting for them. When they approached, Oneflight turned to look at them and greeted them with a friendly nod. "It's good to see you, Oneflight." Pebblestep mewed. "We were worried we wouldn't see you tonight."

"I got Violetstar to agree to let me attend half-moon meetings."

"That's good." Honeyfrost added. "We should get on the move."

"No news about MountainClan?" Oneflight asked, looking at Owlpaw.

Owlpaw shook her head painfully. "Not yet. I gave Mountainstar some herbs and taught her a little bit about treating sickness. This was the night--" She cut off. "That I wound up in MoonClan." Oneflight's tail twitched a bit but he didn't say anything. "They have an expecting queen, she's still not due for another moon but I wanted to see if they hadn't found a medicine cat by the nif they could rely on you for help."

"Of course." Oneflight nodded as the medicine cats continued on their journey. "Though hopefully they find a medicine cat soon." Owlpaw agreed painfully and they continued. After a while they met up with Roseheart and Blackstorm and Owlpaw could instantly feel the tension between Blackstorm and Oneflight.

The two of them shared a long glare between each other until Roseheart stepped between them. "Come on, what is going on between your Clans doesn't matter tonight. We are medicine cats, let's act like it." Owlpaw didn't often see Roseheart being assertive, but it seemed to break the tension and they could continue, with Blackstorm and Oneflight making sure to keep their distance from

each other.

They made their way to the Spirit Garden in mostly silence, only a few side conversations before they reached the Spirit Garden. Owlpaw was eager to speak to Mosscloud, but it Honeyfrost stepped forward. "Before we sleep," She spoke up. "There is something I would like to do."

Owlpaw tilted her head, looking at her mentor in confusion. "Is everything okay?" She had noticed Honeyfrost asking a bit weird the last couple of days, she wasn't giving Owlpaw a lot of training and mostly sending her off to just do medicine cat duties.

"Yes, this is something I have been thinking of for a while." Honeyfrost stood directly in front of Owlpaw. "You've been dealing with a lot lately, and while you are still very young I believe that you have learned quickly and have proved yourself as a competent medicine cat."

Owlpaw looked at Pebblestep who didn't seem confused at all, but Owlpaw was incredibly confused. "What are you doing?" She questioned while the other medicine cats watched.

"I am giving you your full medicine cat name, Owlpaw."

Owlpaw let out a gasp and her eyes widened. "Really? I-I don't feel like I'm ready or like I've earned it."

"You have, Owlpaw." Pebblestep spoke up. "You've haven't been a medicine cat apprentice for a long time but even before your official training you preformed well and you have taken on a lot of responsibilities. You're ready."

Owlpaw stared at both the medicine cats, and while they spoke with confidence and certainty. *I don't feel ready.* Owlpaw thought. *But I will trust them.* "Alright." She nodded. "I would be honored to earn my name tonight."

Pebblestep gave Honeyfrost a nod to continue and she faced her mentor as bravely as she could. "As I said before," Honeyfrost began. "You may be young, but you have proven time and time

again to be strong-willed and dedicated medicine cat and I am happy to preform this ceremony." Owlpaw forced her body to stay still as she continued. "I, Honeyfrost, medicine cat of SunClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. She has trained hard to understand the ways of a medicine cat, and with your help she will serve her Clan for many moons. Owlpaw,, do you promise to uphold the ways of a medicine cat, to stand apart from rivalry between Clan and Clan and to protect all cats equally, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do." Owlpaw said, unable to stop her voice from trembling.

"Then by the powers of StarClan I give you your true name as a medicine day. From this day forward you will be known as Owlbreeze. SunClan honors your compassionate heart and dedication and I am proud to welcome you as a true medicine cat of SunClan."

Despite her original doubts, Owlbreeze felt pride in her new name. She stepped forward as Honeyfrost rested her muzzle on her forehead and Owlbreeze licked her shoulder. "Thank you." She whispered quietly. "For everything." Owlbreeze stepped back as Honeyfrost looked down on her proudly.

"Owlbreeze! Owlbreeze!" The other medicine cats cheered her new name and she felt warmed by them. *If Honeyfrost says I earned this, then I will believe her.*

With the ceremony ending it was now time to speak with their ancestors and Owlbreeze reconnected with her own reality. *At least I can still talk to Mosscloud, I just pray she actually gives me answers.* Owlbreeze curled up close to the star-shaped flower in the center of the Spirit Garden and closed her eyes. She took a few deep breaths, allowing herself and letting sleep take her.

Owlbreeze opened her eyes and as with the last half-moon, she was now alone in the Spirit Garden. This time she figured where Mosscloud was and she rose from her sleeping position and stepped out of the Spirit Garden den and sure enough, Mosscloud was sitting in the same spot as last time.

She rose to her paws and faced Owlbreeze. "Congratulations on your new name." She dipped her head. "You've earned it."

"Thank you." Owlbreeze sighed. "I still don't think I fully earned it, but we need to talk about everything going on. I still haven't received any sign of MountainClan's future medicine cat and the war is already started and no one is doing anything about!" Owlbreeze didn't realize her voice had escalated into a yell. She felt all her frustrations build up at once. She stopped her self, dropping her head and letting out an unsteady sigh. "Sorry, I didn't mean to yell."

"It's okay." Mosscloud's voice was soothing. "There is a lot of responsibility being forced onto you, it's not fair. You have every right to be upset and overwhelmed." Owlpaw sat down, slumping her shoulders down.

"I don't know what I'm supposed to do." She whimpered. "It feels like there's nothing I can do. I can't help MountainClan, I can't stop this war, I just--I can't fix anything."

"StarClan doesn't expect you to stop an entire war by yourself." Mosscloud replied, getting Owlbreeze to look up at her. "You did what you needed to do, you were given a warning. That the blood moon was a sign of war. You relayed that message to Dawnstar and while she isn't doing anything now, she knows. That's all you need to do right now."

"Then why does it feel like I need to do more?" Owlbreeze asked desperately. "I don't want this war to happen."

"It's out of your control whether this war happens or not, Owlbreeze. You can't control Violetstar or Riverstar, or even Dawnstar for that matter. The only cat you can control is yourself."

Owlbreeze stared at her paws. *It doesn't even feel like I can do that.* "But what about MountainClan?" She changed the subject. "Leaf-bare is growing worse, and Riverstep is expecting kits. They *need* a medicine cat and they need time to learn."

"We already know who MountainClan's new medicine cat is, they

just need to realize it themselves."

Owlbreeze's eyes widened and she jumped to her paws. "Who is it? You have to tell me so I can bring them to the Clan."

"In time, Owlbreeze." Mosscloud spoke in a hushing manner.

"MountainClan doesn't have time!" Owlbreeze cried out. "They need a medicine cat as soon as possible!"
"We've already been sending you signs, you just have to look closely." Owlbreeze stared at her. "Look within yourself, you will see the signs as clear as day."

Owlbreeze sighed again, turning away from Mosscloud and looked over the territories. *How have I missed it? I've been paying attention to every single little detail.* "I know it's difficult." Mosscloud continued. "But keep your hope alive, Owlbreeze. You will find your answers before you know it. I promise you."

How can I keep hope alive when StarClan won't give me a single straight answer? Owlbreeze stared into the starry sky. *I'll keep trusting them, but I can't take much more of this.*

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Owlbreeze settled into her nest for the night, not feeling any better since the half-moon meeting two days ago. She had been trying to find signs in anything she could, from falling leaves to odd shaped clouds but nothing stood out to her. She felt like she was going mad staring at every little shifting object in the forest.

Upon returning to camp she had been congratulated by her family by the earning of her true medicine cat name but it still felt odd to her. It felt strange that she had earned her true medicine cat name before her siblings had earned their warrior names, but they had been nothing but happy for her.

Owlbreeze rested her chin on her paws and closed her eyes, wishing for sleep to come, but it didn't, at least not long enough to matter. She would fall asleep for short periods at a time, but she would always wake up not long after. She just kept on trying, though,

knowing sleep would come eventually.

Just as Owlbreeze finally felt herself drifting off, she heard the eerie song of the snowy owl that had been following her the last moon. She forced her eyes to stay closed, trying with every fiber of her body to ignore it, but the owl's song cried out again.

Owlbreeze let out a groan and opened her eyes, hearing the owl cry again. She rose to her paws and looked at Pebblestep and Honeyfrost who were sleeping soundly. *So I'm the only one who can hear it again.* She thought bitterly and left the medicine cat den. She spotted Redclaw sitting guard tonight and she didn't feel like talking to him so she turned and went behind the medicine cat den where she new an easy climb to the outside of the camp was.

The entire time she climbed she heard the owl's song. *It won't let me sleep, so let me see what this stupid bird wants.* She looked up and saw the owl circling over head. It landed on a branch near her and she trotted over to it. "What do you want from me?" Owlbreeze questioned. "You won't leave me alone, you won't let me sleep so what do you want me to do? Just show me! Show me and I'll do it! I just want this to stop."

The owl rose from the branch, flying through the air and towards the other side of the territory, towards the MoonClan border once again. Owlbreeze started after it, she would lose it from sight every once in a while but its cry would guide her further. Eventually, Owlbreeze broke into a sprint trying to keep up with it.

Just like her last fream, the owl brought her to the border with MoonClan. She skidded to a stop, sending snow flying into the slow flowing river. "I can't go any farther than this." She told the owl, which started circling overhead. "What do you want me to do? Is it something wrong with MoonClan?"

The owl began flying away once again, towards MoonClan territory. "Come back!" Owlbreeze cried out. "I don't know what you want me to do! Are you a sign--" Owlbreeze stopped herself. "A sign from StarClan..." The owl cried out once again, this time louder. It's song echoing throughout the trees. Owlbreeze looked down, looking at her reflecting in the flowing river. *Look within yourself, you will see*

the signs as clear as day. Owlbreeze heard Mosscloud's words repeat in her mind.

She heard flapping beside her as the owl landed on a low branch on a nearby oak tree. She looked deep into it's golden eyes. "You're not going to MoonClan, are you?" The owl responded with a quiet hoot. "You've been trying to show me this entire time." She let out a sigh, her breath billowing out in the cold air.

"I know who MountainClan's new medicine cat is." She slowly raised her head up, staring into the dark, star-filled sky of Silverpelt. "It's me."

Chapter 32

Owlbreeze stared at her reflection in the gentle flowing river as she slowly came to terms with what she had realized. She felt a shock in her chest, but she also felt like all the signs had been so obvious. The owl had been trying to guide her to MountainClan since even before Mothflower left. *Was I always meant to be with them?* She felt a raging storm of conflicted feelings raging in her heart and mind.

"How am I supposed to just leave?" Owlbreeze spoke aloud. "How am I supposed to just leave my Clan? Everyone I've ever loved is in this Clan. My family, my friends, everyone." She stood up, turning in the direction of her Clan. *But you wanted this, didn't you?* Her own voice spoke in her mind, clawing at thoughts she had kept hidden even from herself for so long. *You've been drawn to them ever since they joined the other Clans.*

"Yes but--" Owlbreeze flexed her claws anxiously. "I never thought it would be a possibility. MountainClan had a medicine cat, I did what StarClan wanted me to do, that's all that was needed of me. There was no use for me in MountainClan."

There is now. Owlbreeze dropped her head. *You've been feeling constantly in the way in SunClan, they won't say it but three medicine cats is too many.* Owlbreeze sighed pitifully. "I'll admit it," She glanced longingly over the MoonClan border. "I've thought about being a MountainClan more than once, I felt such a strong bond with Mountainstar, I miss her." *I felt accomplished, I felt needed. In SunClan...I just feel like a burden.*

Owlbreeze felt the cold air starting to make her shiver and ache. *I need to get back home.* She thought. *I will sleep on this, I need time to think about what to do.* She looked at the owl one last time who seemed quiet pleased that it finally got its message to her. She turned her back on the owl and began the long walk home.

By the time she reached her nest her body felt frozen and her lungs were aching. She curled up in her nest, trying to warm herself as

much possible. She did her best to clear her mind and sleep and found that despite her racing mind, she managed to fall asleep in a short amount of time.

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When Owlbreeze opened her eyes it was not morning, she was back by the MoonClan border with the owl flying overhead. *Why am I back here?* She questioned silently. *I got the message.*

"Sorry to pull you back here." Owlbreeze jumped slightly as she heard the voice of Mosscloud. The tortoiseshell she-cat stepped into view, her green as soft as always. "But I imagine you have many questions."

"I don't know if you can answer them." Owlbreeze replied. "I know the message you were sending, I'm supposed to be MountainClan's medicine cat." Mosscloud nodded. "If it was my destiny to be MountainClan's medicine cat why did they bother with having me train Mothflower at all?"

Mosscloud sat down, resting her tail across her paws. "Because it's not your destiny. This was never planned, it was always meant to be Mothflower."

Owlbreeze stared at her in disbelief. "That doesn't make any sense, it clearly wasn't meant to be Mothflower if she left."

"StarClan can't control the actions of cats, Owlbreeze. Mothflower made this choice herself, all we can do is guide and advise. We didn't know Mothflower would struggle as much as she did, even with my training she never had the faith in herself."

"So then why me? Owlbreeze asked once again.

"Because you were the best option. You are already connected with MountainClan, you know the cats there, you are a talented medicine cat and SunClan already has two medicine cats so we wouldn't be risking anything by you leaving." Mosscloud took a deep breath. "I would like you to know, that you don't *have* to do this, Owlbreeze. It is ultimately your choice, we don't want to force

you to do this."

Owlbreeze stared at her for several moments. *My choice?* "Is it really? What happens if I say no then? MountainClan goes without a medicine cat? That doesn't really sound like a choice." Owlbreeze felt even more conflicting feelings, she felt slightly guilty for constantly questioning StarClan's actions, but she couldn't help but feel skeptical of some of their choices and guidance after all the stress they had put her through.

"If you say no and say you wish to stay with SunClan then we will work with our other options. We have a few other choices like selecting one of the already established MountainClan warriors, or bringing in another outsider and having you train them along with me, but after discussing it with the other StarClan medicine cats the best option we came up with was you, but it is your choice."

Owlbreeze sighed and turned away. "I don't know what to do. How can I just leave my loved ones behind? My parents, my siblings, Honeyfrost, Pebblestep...they're all my family."

"I know how hard it is to be separated from your loved ones, but I would like to remind you that medicine cats live different lives. You would not be a rival, you would live in another Clan but I hardly imagine Dawnstar as being the type of cat to keep you from your loved ones."

"I need to think." Owlbreeze responded. "I'll make my decision when I'm ready."

"Of course, Owlbreeze." Mosscloud mewed. "Take your time, I will be watching over you this entire time."

Owlbreeze said nothing in response, she closed her eyes and allowed the forest around her to fade away. She felt bad for being so curt with Mosscloud, but her patience had run out. *My choice, huh.*

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Owlbreeze woke up back in the medicine cat den, feeling just as

tired as she did when she fell asleep. Pebblestep and Honeyfrost were out of the den and from the light filtering in through the den entrance she could tell that it was just before sunhigh. Owlbreeze breathed out a sigh before sitting up.

She took a moment to smooth down her fur and left the den, stepping into the open air of the camp. The air was still cold, but the sky was free of clouds and the sun was shining brightly. The rays reflected off the glittering snow causing Owlbreeze to wince at the brilliance of it.

After her eyes adjusted she looked around camp, and her heart began to ache as she looked at her Clanmates. She saw her parents sharing prey with Cherryleaf and Cloudspots as they laughed and had a pleasant conversation. She spotted Oakpaw, Blossompaw and Rushpaw leaving the camp with their mentors. The SunClan kits playing out in the snow, happily cheering as Sedgefern, Petalbreeze and Dovepool watched them play. *SunClan is my home. This is where I was born.*

Owlbreeze then thought about MountainClan. She thought about the time she lived with Mountainstar in her home with Tumbleweed and the kits. The memories were filled with happiness and welcoming. She remembered training the soon-to-be warriors all about the warrior code and Clan life. She thought about how grateful Nettleheart was when she treated her wound, and how everyone had welcomed her like she was family after visiting them.

MountainClan also feels like home. Ever since she returned to SunClan she had felt as if part of her was incomplete, as if she didn't belong. She did her best to ignore those emotions and focus on being the best SunClan medicine cat she could be but her entire apprenticeship was spent making mistake after mistake. *I felt like my full medicine cat name wasn't earned because I haven't done anything helpful for SunClan. The entire time I've been a medicine cat in SunClan all I've done is get in the way, but with MountainClan...with MountainClan I made a difference. I was needed.*

Owlbreeze knew that all of the cats she cared in SunClan loved her, but they didn't need her. *SunClan doesn't need me.* She closed her eyes, silencing her thoughts for just a moment. *Mosscloud said it was*

my choice. Her eyes slowly opened as she looked over the camp. *So I will make my choice.* She rose to her paws. *I will always love SunClan, but I know where I belong.*

Owlbreeze waited by the medicine cat den for quite a long time until both Honeyfrost and Pebblestep returned. "Good morning, Owlbreeze." Honeyfrost dipped her head. "There is something I needed you to do."

"I have to tell you something." Owlbreeze spoke up. "It's..really important." There was a brief flash of fear in Honeyfrost's eyes but she nodded. "Alright, what is it?"

"I need to tell both of you." Owlbreeze looked between both medicine cats. "...and Dawnstar."

"Dawnstar?" Pebblestep looked at her in confusion but Honeyfrost didn't seem too confused, she almost seemed...sad? *What does she know? How could she know?*

"Yes."

"Well alright." Pebblestep nodded. "Let's go then." All three medicine cats began the walk to Dawnstar's den and Owlbreeze could feel her heart pounding painfully in her chest. *Am I really about to do this? How am I supposed to say it? Do I just tell them? I have to.*

After a short walk they reached Dawnstar's den where she was sitting and talking with Cinderflame and Lionclaw. "Good morning." The leader mewed kindly upon looking at the three medicine cats. "Did you need something?"

"Owlbreeze says she has something important to tell us and you." Owlbreeze met Dawnstar's gaze and thankfully, Dawnstar caught the desperation in her eyes.

"Alright. Cinderflame, Lionclaw, why don't we continue this talk later?"

"Sure." Cinderflame agreed and padded out of the den while Lionclaw nuzzled Dawnstar lovingly while playfully flicking his tail

over Honeyfrost's ears. Once the two of them were gone, Dawnstar sat down and faced Owlbreeze who was barely managing to keep it together.

She felt as it there were stones lodged in her throat and her heart felt heavy, breathing was difficult as she struggled to keep steady. "I don't really know how to begin." Owlbreeze said, her voice stuttering as she avoided eye contact.

"You can tell us, Owlbreeze." Honeyfrost spoke softly.

Owlbreeze took a deep, shaky and almost painful breath before looking up. "I've been thinking about this a lot, and..." The words were almost stuck in her throat. "I've decided to become MountainClan's medicine cat."

"You *what?*" Pebblestep stared at her in disbelief. "Owlbreeze--"

"Please listen." Owlbreeze raised her voice, she hated cutting off Pebblestep but she needed to speak. "This is something I have thought about since I learned Mothflower left. MountainClan *needs* a medicine cat. Sickness could set in at any time and they have an expecting queen. We don't have time to find and train a new medicine cat. When I am here, fully trained and not needed as a SunClan medicine cat."

"What do you mean you are not needed?" Pebblestep questioned. "You are always needed in SunClan."

"Maybe, but SunClan already has two fully trained medicine cats and MountainClan has none. Me leaving won't change anything except maybe tasks will get done a little slower. I can't just stand by any longer and ignore the needs of MountainClan. I have felt out of place in SunClan since I returned and I have tried my best to ignore those feelings but they keep coming up, I feel like a burden and like I am constantly in the way. In MountainClan this will not be the case. They *need* a medicine cat, they need me a lot more than SunClan needs me."

There was a long, painful moment of silence. Honeyfrost stared at her paws while Dawnstar's eyes shadowed sadness. "You sure this is

what you really want? Cause I could allow you to simply stay in MountainClan until a new medicine cat is trained."

"Yes this is what I want." Owlbreeze replied to the Clan leader. "Like I said, MountainClan doesn't have the time to focus on me training a medicine cat, I need to focus on keeping the Clan healthy and helping Riverstep give birth to healthy kits. This is the best way. I don't want to leave my loved ones behind, but I know this is what I have to do."

"Honeyfrost will you say something?" Pebblestep spoke up. "Talk some sense into her!"

"I can't do that, Pebblestep." Honeyfrost lifted her head and letting out a sigh. "Since you returned, Owlbreeze, I knew that a part of your heart would always be with MountainClan. You talked about them like they were your family but Earthpelt never did. I did my best to make you feel needed in SunClan, but it *is* difficult when SunClan has three medicine cats. I did my best to help you thrive, but I could tell that your heart wasn't fully in SunClan." Owlbreeze stared at her mentor, feeling her heart ache as she spoke. "Then when we learned that Mothflower left I knew that it was only a matter of time before you went to them. That is part of the reason why I gave you your true medicine cat name." Owlbreeze's eyes widened. "I do believe you earned it, I couldn't think of another cat who deserved it more." She looked from Pebblestep to Dawnstar. "We can't change her mind, I know my apprentice very well."

Owlbreeze looked at Honeyfrost gratefully. "Thank you." She said quietly.

Pebblestep sighed sadly and walked over to Owlbreeze, touching her forehead to hers. "When you were born we knew you would have an incredible destiny, and that you would do incredible things. You may be a fellow medicine cat but you are still my niece. You will always be my family above all else. I saved your life as a kit, and everyday I thank StarClan for letting me bring you back."

"You'll always be my family too." Owlbreeze said quietly. "Thank you for everything."

Owlbreeze stepped away, looking at the two cats who had given her everything for the last several moons. *I'm going to miss them so much.* She turned her attention to Dawnstar who looked at her with soft eyes.

"I see your mind is very much made up." She said. "Please know that no matter where you go, you will always be welcome in SunClan. I know MountainClan will be incredibly lucky to have you as their medicine cat. We should tell the Clan, especially your family."

Owlbreeze dropped her head, telling her family would be the hardest part of it all. Saying goodbye to Blossompaw would be the hardest thing she's ever done. Owlbreeze nodded after a few moments and the three of them stepped out into the camp where Dawnstar leapt onto the SunStone. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather for a Clan meeting!"

Owlbreeze watched her siblings in particular who had returned from their earlier training session, they looked at her in confusion. She turned away, knowing she would have to face them eventually but not able to do it right now. "This is not a meeting I ever expected to hold," Dawnstar began. "But Owlbreeze has come to me and told me something important. She has decided to join MountainClan and become their medicine cat."

Gasps spread out among the Clan and all of Owlbreeze's family ran to her. "What is she talking about?" Briarrose demanded.

"You can't leave!" Blossompaw cried out, the pain in her sister's eyes broke Owlbreeze's heart.

"Let her explain herself." As always it was Rushpaw who spoke up, silencing their family.

Owlbreeze took a deep breath, raising her voice so all of SunClan could hear her. "I've thought about this for a while, MountainClan's medicine cat left them and they need one. Ever since I got home I have felt connected to them, this is my decision and while it's not easy to leave my home and my loved ones, I know it's what I have to do."

"You're not MountainClan's medicine cat!" Blossompaw cried out again. "You can't just leave us. We need you, Owlbreeze! *I* need you!" Owlbreeze could see pain and sorrow deep in her sister's amber eyes. *I'm so sorry, Blossompaw.*

"Blossompaw, I will always be here for you. You're my sister and nothing can ever change that, no matter how far apart you are. We will see eachother every gathering--"
"I don't wanna see you at gatherings!" She wailed. "I want to see you whenever I want! I want to share prey with you! You can't do this, *please!*" Blossompaw's pleading was almost enough to change her mind complete, and while she felt an immense amount of guilt, she couldn't.

"I'm sorry, Blossompaw." Owlbreeze mewed in pitiful defeat.

Blossompaw stared at her for a moment before she turned and ran, vanishing into the apprentice den and leaving Owlbreeze with an aching heart. "Blossompaw is right," It was Briarrose who spoke up frantically. "You can't just leave us, Owlbreeze. You are a *SunClan* cat!"

"This is my choice." Owlbreeze repeated. "I will always have the blood of a SunClan cat, but I just can't ignore my heart anymore. MountainClan is where I need to be, they need me."

"*We* need you!" Briarrose cried out.

"You can't just leave." Oakpaw added, she could tell her brother was struggling to process his emotions.

"Look at her." Rushpaw spoke up, stepping forward. "Just because Owlbreeze is leaving doesn't mean she doesn't love us or her Clan." Rushpaw met Owlbreeze's eyes. She could see the same pain in his eyes, but there was also pride and love. She held his gaze for a long moment, incredibly grateful for her older brother. *He's always believed in me. He's always supported me. He's never once doubted me.* "Owlbreeze is needed somewhere else, we will always be connected to her no matter what. She's no longer the little kit we grew up with, she's a full medicine cat and she has a destiny to fulfill."

"We know you're right." Yarrowtail finally spoke up. "But it doesn't make it any easier." He stepped forward and nuzzled Owlbreeze lovingly. "We know you will do great things." Owlbreeze returned the affection, purring loudly at the love she felt from her father.

Eventually Briarrose and Oakpaw stepped forward, showing her the same support and the four of them surrounded Owlbreeze with nothing but love, but Blossompaw was noticeably missing. *I hope someday you can forgive me.* Owlbreeze thought hopefully.

"I want to go too." A sudden voice send another wave of gasps throughout the crowd. Owlbreeze stepped away from her family and looked towards the direction, her eyes widened as she saw the voice came from Flamepetal.

"What are you talking about, Flamepetal?" Heatherflight questioned. "You are a SunClan warrior, you always have been."

"I know." Flamepetal sighed, dropping her head as she was approached by her three siblings. "But nothing has ever felt right...not since Willownose died." Owlbreeze recalled the fear in Flamepetal's eyes when they talked. "We lost our parents, and since then I've had no one to lean on for support like you all do. Brackenpelt had Squirreltail, Fawnheart has Turtleblaze and Heatherflight has Flashtail. I have...no one. I have not felt at home in SunClan for as long as I can remember, but I know that I wouldn't survive on my own as a loner or rogue but...watching Owlbreeze talk about leaving, maybe I could finally find a place to belong in MountainClan."

"You can't be serious." Fawnheart spoke up. "Owlbreeze has always been connected to MountainClan but you...you haven't even met them, you know nothing about MountainClan!"

"I know they're full of outsiders. Rouges, loners and even kittypets so why not me? A cat who feels like an outsider."

"Is that what you really want?" Brackenpelt questioned. "To leave?"

Flamepetal nodded slowly. "It is.."

There was a long moment of silent bet ween all the siblings, a silent war waging in their eyes but it was outshined by the determined glow in Flamepetal's. They sighed in defeat. "Then..." Heatherflight touched her muzzle to Flamepetal's cheek. "We will miss you, we will miss you so much. I hope you can find the happiness you're looking for."

Owlbreeze spent more time with her own family while Flamepetal said goodbye to hers. It was an incredibly painful experience, but the love of her family also gave her strength. However, she kept glancing towards the apprentice den hoping Blossompaw would come back out.

When it was finally time, Owlbreeze approached Flamepetal. "I suppose it's time. I'm sure Mountainstar will happily welcome us both."

Flamepetal nodded nervously. "I hope so." Owlbreeze gave her an assuring look before the two of them headed towards the entrance.

"May StarClan light your paths." Dawnstar spoke happily, her voice shaking with emotion.

"Goodbye!"

"We'll miss you!"
"Safe travels!"

Owlbreeze looked over each and every SunClan cat. *Thank you. Thank you for giving me a home. I'll always love you all.* "Let's go." Owlbreeze turned to Flamepetal and the two of them left SunClan camp for the last time as SunClan warriors.

During the walk to the MoonClan border Owlbreeze answered several questions about MountainClan asked by Flamepetal and the farther they got, the more excited she seemed. *I don't think I've ever seen Flamepetal this lively.* She thought happily.

"We'll cross through the gathering hollow, it's a bit longer but I think we should avoid MoonClan for now."

"Sounds good." Flamepetal agreed and right as they were about to

cross she heard a pained and frantic voice through the trees.

"Owlbreeze!" She quickly recognized the voice of Blossompaw. Owlbreeze barely had any time to react as Blossompaw exploded out from the trees and tackled Owlbreeze to the ground. "I'm sorry!" She wailed. "I should've been supportive, I just--I'm going to miss you so much! You're my best friend!" Blossompaw buried her muzzle into Owbreeze's chest and sobbed while Owlbreeze pressed her whole body against her sister's. "But I couldn't let you leave without saying goodbye."

"I'm going to miss you too." Owlbreeze replied, losing completely control over her emotions. "I'm so sorry, I will miss you so much. You've always been there for me, but you'll be just fine without me. We'll always be best friends, we'll always be sisters, no matter how far we go."

"I know." Blossompaw whimpered. "Promise me you'll see me at every single gathering, and visit like Dawnstar said you could."

"I will." Owlbreeze promised as Blossompaw finally let up. "And I know Mountainstar, she will let you visit whenever you want as long as Dawnstar allows it."

Blossompaw nodded, her eyes filled with love and pain. "MountainClan is very lucky to have you as their medicine cat, and I know you'll do amazing things. I love you so much, Owlbreeze. You're my sister forever and always."

"Forever and always." Owlbreeze promised, touching her muzzle to her sisters. "And I know you will be an amazing SunClan warrior, know that I'll think about you every single day."

"And I'll think about you too." Blossompaw said with a small laugh. "Good luck, sister. I know you'll do great."

"You will too." Owlbreeze stepped back, her heart feeling whole once again. *I will always be here for you Blossompaw, never forget that.* Flamepetal and Owlbreeze painfully bid farewell to Blossompaw and ventured across the river and started the last leg of their journey to MountainClan camp.

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"This is it." Owlbreeze told Flamepetal as they arrived at the MountainClan camp entrance. "Careful climbing, you may scrape up your paws a bit but you'll get used to it after a while."

"Alright." Flamepetal nodded and watched Owlbreeze climb up the stone path into the MountainClan camp. Flamepetal climbed with ease after her and the two of them entered the camp. Instantly they caught the attention of Mountainstar and Nettleheart who were sharing tongues under the shelter of the leader's den ledge.

Mountainstar instantly rose to her paws and trotted over to Flamepetal and Owlbreeze. "Owlpaw? And who is this?"

"This is my Clanmate, Flamepetal and it's actually Owlbreeze now."

"Oh," Mountainstar looked at her in surprise. "Well congratulations." She dipped her head respectfully,

"What brings you to our camp?"

Owlbreeze took a deep breathe, she felt no more nerves. She knew that Mountainstar would welcome her *and* Flamepetal. "I'm here to become your medicine cat." Mountainstar's eyes widened. "Permanently."

"You want to be our medicine cat? What about SunClan?"

"SunClan has two perfectly capable medicine cats, MountainClan has none. Plus, I've always felt at home with MountainClan...it's also my decision to join."

There was a lot of emotions stirring in Mountainstar's golden eyes, but the biggest one was relief. "Well, we will be very lucky to have you." Mountainstar dipped her head respectfully. "I know we will all welcome you." She turned her attention to Flamepetal. "And you?"

"I-" Flamepetal's voice faltered for a moment. "I want to join as well, as a warrior. I've felt out of place in my Clan for a long time, I want something to change."

"Then you are welcome as well, Flamepetal." Mountainstar dipped her head. "We should tell the Clan right away."

Mountainstar walked over to Nettleheart and Owlbreeze assumed, told her what was going on. Nettleheart's eyes lit up and she followed Mountainstar to the top of the ledge. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather for a Clan meeting!"

Owlbreeze and Flamepetal shared a glance and approached the center of the camp while the rest of MountainClan approached as well. The Clan really was quite small, but she couldn't help but notice Sparrowpaw poking his head out from the medicine cat den. *Is he sick? It's a good thing I came when I did.*

The cats of MountainClan all looked at Owlbreeze and Flamepetal curiously, but with no hostility. "You all know Owlbreeze," Mountainstar began. "She helped formed our Clan, and she is here with her Clanmates Flamepetal and both of them have made the decision to join our Clan, with Owlbreeze becoming our medicine cat."

Mews of shocks and relief filled the hollow, but Mountainstar continued. "I am happy to welcome both of them, but I also want to make sure all of you are as well. So any cats in favor of these two joining our Clan, say I."

"I!" Every single MountainClan voice spoke in unison and Owlbreeze felt warmed by their welcome. She felt...home.

"Then I would like to do something to make it official." Mountainstar purred, resting her eyes on Flamepetal. "Flamepetal, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend MountainClan, even at the cost of your life."

"I do." Flamepetal's voice was steady as she took an oath for her new Clan.

"Then I welcome you as a full MountainClan warrior! As well as Owlbreeze as our brand new medicine cat. We held onto hope, and our prayers have been answered. MountainClan will live on!"

"Owlbreeze! Flamepetal! Owlbreeze! Flamepetal!"

Owlbreeze watched as the MountainClan warriors rushed over to Flamepetal, asking her all kinds of questions about her and Flamepetal's eyes lit up with joy. Owlbreeze let out a purr. *Who knew Flamepetal would live a whole new life as well.*

Owlbreeze looked away from her new Clanmates as her reality set in. *I'm a MountainClan cat now.* She thought, glancing up towards the darkening sky and for the first time in moons, Owlbreeze felt something she hadn't felt in a long time. She felt hope.